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BOOK REVIEWS

STR 14.1 (Spring 2023): 1–21

The Purpose of Ephesians 3:2–13, Once More

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Abstract: *Recent attempts to address the purpose of the digression in Eph 3:2–13 have failed to capitalize on the significance of this text's climax in Eph 3:13a. This essay addresses this issue via a literary analysis of the passage and the wider context of the letter. In terms of the actual digression, the statements in Eph 3:2–12 provide the basis for the exhortation towards faithful Christian service in Eph 3:13a. Furthermore, the digression builds upon the missional depiction of the Church in Eph 1:23 and 2:19–22 and also prepares the reader for the brief, yet important, references to opposition in Eph 4:14 and Eph 6:10–20. Ultimately, the digression in Eph 3:2–13 addresses Paul's description of his imprisonment in Eph 3:1 and implores the reader to participate in the Church's identity as Christ's "body" and "fullness" (Eph 1:23), despite the very real possibility of suffering for the sake of the gospel.*

Key Words: *body, Christian ministry, Ephesians 3, fullness, mission, perseverance, structure, suffering, temple*

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has long held a prominent place within the Christian community. Yet this deeply profound text is not without its fair share of challenging interpretive issues.[1] Various historical questions (for example, the identity of its author, the identity of its recipients, the purpose of this letter, and the letter's setting) still loom large over this text. Yet, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is not without literary conundrums as well, particularly the function of the digression in Eph 3:2–13. While the probing studies of T. Gombis and A. Sherwood have brought some measure of clarity to this particular issue, they do not sufficiently explain the place of this passage within the overall letter.[2] In this essay, I will argue that Paul's digression in Eph 3:2–13 builds upon the missional emphasis

[1] The authorship of Ephesians continues to be a subject of debate within the academy. The answer to this question, however, does not significantly affect the argument of this paper. I will therefore refer to the author of Ephesians as "Paul."

[2] T. Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13: Pointless Digression, or the Epitome of the Triumph of God in Christ," *WTJ* 66 (2004): 313–23; A. Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethne*: A Discourse Analysis of Ephesians 3:1–13," *BBR* 22 (2012): 97–112.

in Eph 1–2 and encourages Christ-followers to faithfully participate in the Church's mission, even in the face of opposition from a hostile, unbelieving world.

History of Interpretation

Ephesians 3:2–13 is widely viewed as a digression with the debate centering around its precise function within the letter. For some scholars, Paul's digression comprises a random set of statements that are completely unrelated to his larger concerns in this letter. J. Kirby, for example, describes Eph 3:2–13 as a "long parenthesis" that bears no apparent connection to the rest of the letter.[3] For other scholars, this digression (in various ways) is an integral part of Paul's overall argument and holds an important rhetorical function within the letter. T. Gombis's influential study on this question marks something of a watershed moment within this debate. Prior to Gombis's study, those who argued that this passage was related to the overall argument generally viewed this text as some form of apostolic defense (either of Paul or a pseudonymous author).[4]

[3] J. Kirby, *Ephesians, Baptism and Pentecost: An Inquiry into the Structure and Purpose of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), 129–31. Kirby largely views Eph 3:2–13 as the work of a pseudonymous writer who has reworked (for some reason) Col 1:27 and various texts in Eph 1–2 into this "long parenthesis." Cf. H. Merklein, *Das kirchliche Amt nach dem Epheserbrief*, SANT 33 (Munich: Kösel, 1973), 159–61.

[4] Generally speaking, those who view Ephesians as a pseudonymous composition argue Eph 3:2–13 was composed to remind Gentile readers of their indebtedness to the apostle Paul with a view to buttressing the (pseudonymous) author's authority and strengthening the reader's bonds to the apostolic tradition. Cf. A. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 171; R. Schnackenburg, *Brief an die Epheser,* EKKNT 10 (Zürich: Neukirchener, 1982), 131. Scholars who support the Pauline authorship of Ephesians generally argue this text builds upon Eph 2:11–22 by describing the history behind Paul's role as apostle to the Gentiles. E.g., C. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 179–80; H. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 417; F. Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 187, 189–90; E. Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 292. R. Jeal helpfully accounts for the significance of Eph 3:13 by suggesting Paul intends the digression to explain his role in the Gentile mission *and* avert any discouragement the original readers might experience because of his imprisonment. The argument within this article will largely build upon Jeal's conclusion regarding this text (*Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of Communication* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2000], 164, 174).

This approach is problematic because it does not explain Paul's external viewpoint in vv. 10–12 and it fails to account for the minimal role criticism of Paul's apostleship plays in this letter.

Gombis's article on this issue essentially argues that the digression in vv. 2–13 is a "defense of the triumph of God in Christ."[5] According to Gombis, Paul has narrated God's victory in Christ within Eph 1:20–2:22, and this portion of the letter provides the immediate context for Eph 3:2–13.[6] Gombis then suggests Paul's reference to his imprisonment in Eph 3:1 leads him to answer the question, "If Christ Jesus is exalted to the position of cosmic supremacy over the powers ruling the present evil age, then why is Paul in prison?" in Eph 3:2–13.[7] According to Gombis, Paul answers this question by placing his earthly ministry (including his current imprisonment) within its cosmic context.[8] From Gombis's perspective, Paul's defense of God's triumph over the powers consists of a two-fold argument. First, Paul depicts himself as a "recipient of divine revelation" in Eph 3:3–7.[9] Second, Paul portrays himself as an "agent of divine triumph" as his ministry gives rise to the creation of the Church (vv. 8b–9), whose existence establishes the efficacy of God's plan and thereby vindicates him before the powers (v. 10).[10]

Ultimately, Gombis's analysis of Eph 3:2–13 highlights the paradoxical nature of Paul's argument in this text and clarifies how the digression builds upon Eph 1:20–2:22. His work thus provides a significant corrective to readings of this text that minimize its place within the letter, either by simply viewing it as a mere defense of Paul's apostleship or untying it from Paul's overall argument. Nonetheless, while Gombis traces the argument of Eph 3:2–13 well, he fails to account sufficiently for: (1) Paul's shift from addressing his own ministry in vv. 2–9 to discussing the Church's role in the divine plan in vv. 10–13; (2) the significance of Paul's reference to Christ's faithfulness in v. 12; and (3) the climax of Paul's argument in v. 13, particularly in terms of the meaning of the infinitive

[5] Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 316. Cf. S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), 212.

[6] Gombis is here building upon his related article, "Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 403–18. While Gombis's understanding of Eph 1:20–2:22 is helpful at points, his dependence upon ANE temple-building traditions is especially problematic as it leads him to conclude Eph 1:20–2:22 follows an ANE pattern of divine-warfare. Cf. Gombis, "Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare," 407–18.

[7] Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 316.

[8] Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 316.

[9] Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 318–19.

[10] Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 319–23.

ἐγκακεῖν.

Aaron Sherwood has also attempted to address the purpose of Paul's digression in Eph 3:2–13. His work on this subject primarily involves a discourse analysis of the text that seeks to reveal its inner logic and clarify how it is related to the remainder of the letter. Sherwood's analysis is particularly helpful because it points to the central place of v. 13 within the argument of vv. 2–13 as the "explicit conclusion" of the entire text.[11] This leads Sherwood to conclude that the digression's main aim is to demonstrate that Paul's "imprisonment does not cast doubt on either God's eschatological plan or the audience's involvement in it but instead demonstrates the efficacy of God's plan and the audience's part within it."[12] For Sherwood, this particularly involves the reality that the Gentile "audience has benefitted from God's use of Paul to promote their own *doxa*."[13]

From his analysis of Eph 3:2–13, Sherwood concludes Paul's digression primarily validates his prior argument *and* provides the basis for the prayer/doxology that commences at Eph 3:14. According to Sherwood, Eph 1:3–2:22 describes God's redemptive plan and work within salvation history but does so from the viewpoint of Paul's reader.[14] The digression then, according to Sherwood, focuses on Paul's role in God's plan but returns to the first person plural language that dominates Eph 2 at Eph 3:12; the digression thus wraps Paul and the reader up into God's plan and provides a dual portrait of God's work in salvation history.[15] Having addressed the natural concern raised by his comments concerning his incarceration in Eph 3:1 within the digression and having

[11] Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 100.

[12] Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 100.

[13] Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 108. For Sherwood, the use of the noun δόξα in v. 13 is largely Paul's way of summarizing the positive outlook the reader should have towards Paul's apostleship that is based on his description of his ministry and involvement in God's plan within vv. 2–12.

[14] Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 109.

[15] Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 109. Due to his emphasis on the relative clause ἥτις ἐστὶν δόξα ὑμῶν in Eph 3:13b, Sherwood places great stress on the Gentile reader's accrual of benefits from Paul's participation in the divine plan. However, his analysis of the text largely bypasses the significance of the exhortation in v. 13a and does not account for the Gentile reader's own *active* participation in God's plan for cosmic reconciliation. Gombis, likewise, does not account sufficiently for the significance of these two features of the text.

shown his imprisonment actually is for the reader's *doxa*, Sherwood suggests Paul is then legitimately able to resume his prayer in Eph 3:14.[16]

While Sherwood's treatment of this passage is insightful, his overall argument is problematic in three ways. First, he fails to note that this letter concerns more than just how Christ-followers *benefit* from God's plan; it also addresses (at some length) how believers *participate* in God's plan (cf. Eph 1:23; 4:11–16; 6:10–18). Second, and related to the first problem, he largely ignores Eph 3:13a in his analysis and wrongly treats the *subordinate* clause in Eph 3:13b (ἥτις ἐστὶν δόξα ὑμῶν) as the central portion of Paul's conclusion in the digression. This void in Sherwood's analysis seems to contribute to his failure to account for the importance of the Church's participation in God's plan within this letter. Third, he interprets the noun δόξα in Eph 3:13b within the honor-shame dynamic of Greco-Roman culture, rather than viewing it as a shorthand reference to eschatological salvation (cf. Rom 8:18, 21; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:18).[17] Sherwood's misinterpretation of the noun δόξα in v. 13 then leads him to interpret the Gentile audience's involvement in God's plan purely in terms of the reception of the benefits of the gospel and minimize their role in the *missio dei*. Ultimately, Sherwood's overemphasis on Eph 3:13b (rather than Eph 3:13a) leads to a rather limited account of how Paul's digression resonates with the rest of the letter.

The Context of Ephesians 3:2–13

The appropriate point of departure for appreciating the context of Eph 3:2–13 is Paul's introductory *berakah* in Eph 1:3–14. This literary unit highlights various spiritual benefits Christ-followers have received as a result of their mystical union with the risen Messiah (cf. Eph 1:3) and introduces the central theme of the letter in Eph 1:10. In context, Paul's statements in v. 10 are a development of the preceding comments concerning the "mystery" (μυστήριον) that God has planned in the Messiah (v. 9).[18] According to v. 10, this "mystery" involves the implementation

[16] According to Sherwood, the digression in Eph 3:2–13 is to be read with Eph 2:1–22, and both texts "exhibit the realization of God's purposes from both the audience's and Paul's perspectives, so that they compose a joint *narratio* that is doubly forceful in providing a reason for the prayer and doxology beginning with the resumptive τούτου χάριν in 3:14" ("Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 109).

[17] Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 106–8. Cf. T. Scacewater, "Ephesians," in *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings*, ed. T. Scacewater (Dallas: Fontes, 2020), 345–46. See Lincoln for a helpful examination of the noun in Eph 3:13 (*Ephesians*, 191–92).

[18] Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are derived from the ESV.

concerning the "mystery" (μυστήριον) that God has planned in the Messiah (v. 9).[18] According to v. 10, this "mystery" involves the implementation of God's plan for "the fullness of time." Paul highlights the purpose of this divine plan through the phrase ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ in v. 10. Through this phrase, Paul suggests the divine plan principally involves cosmic unification and the establishment of a new creation.[19] The precise object of this act of new creation is then specified through the phrase τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ in v. 10. When understood within the context of this entire letter, the "things in heaven" principally refers to the forces of cosmic evil that have set themselves in rebellion against God, while the "things on earth" likely refers to divided humanity.[20] The divine plan established in Christ then involves restoring the fractured universe, both in terms of humanity and the presence of cosmic evil (cf. Col 1:20).

The next text that is particularly pertinent for establishing the literary context of Eph 3:2–13 is Eph 1:23. Here, Paul builds upon his reference to the "Church" in v. 22 and describes the Christian community as Christ's "body" and "the fullness of him [Christ] who fills all [τὰ πάντα] in all." Paul's portrait of the Christian community in this text poses a number of challenging lexical, grammatical, and theological problems. The precise meaning of the noun πλήρωμα and the voice of the participle πληρουμένου in v. 23, however, are especially relevant to this present analysis. In terms of the first issue, most scholars conclude the noun πλήρωμα in Eph 1:23 carries a passive sense.[21] Furthermore, in combination with the noun σῶμα in v. 23, the noun πλήρωμα likely portrays the

[18] Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are derived from the ESV.

[19] The infinitive ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι in v. 10 is derived from the verb ἀνακεφαλαιόω, which refers to an action involving distinct entities being brought together under the framework of a single entity (cf. M. Owens, *As It Was in the Beginning: An Intertextual Analysis of New Creation in Galatians, 2 Corinthians, and Ephesians* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015], 129; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 67). Several scholars have concluded this picture of cosmic unification in Eph 1:10 is related to the letter's new creation theme and have also argued the infinitive ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι in Eph 1:10 carries a recapitulatory sense. Cf. Owens, *Beginning*, 126–30; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 33–34; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 89; M. Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, AB 34a (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 91–92.

[20] Cf. C. Caragounis, *The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content*, ConBNT 8 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977), 139–46.

[21] E.g., G. Sellin, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, KEK 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 154–56; Best, *Ephesians*, 187–89; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 114.

Church as the earthly presence and representative of the risen Christ.[22] With regard to the second question, scholars have generally interpreted the voice of the participle πληρουμένου in three ways: (1) as a passive (i.e., the risen Christ is being filled by the Church); (2) as a true middle (i.e., the risen Christ is filling the Church and the cosmos for his own benefit); and (3) as a middle with an active sense (i.e., the risen Christ is filling the Church and the cosmos).[23] Of these three options, most scholars conclude that it is the third option that makes the most sense within the context of Eph 1:23 (cf. Eph 3:19; Col 1:19; 2:9–10).[24]

This interpretation of Eph 1:23 has significant implications for understanding Paul's portrayal of the Christian community in Ephesians. Paul's statements in Eph 1:23 clearly bring ecclesiology and Christology together and a brief examination of his train of thought in Ephesians 1 clarifies the relationship between these two theological categories in Eph 1:23. More specifically, the phrase τὰ πάντα in v. 23 is likely an intratextual allusion back to Eph 1:10, where Paul presents God's ultimate goal for the cosmos ("to unite all things in him [Christ])." Yet, Paul's statements in v. 23 also expand upon his description of the exercise of divine power in the Messiah within Eph 1:20–22. When read with Eph 1:10 and Eph 1:20–22, the portrait of the Christian community in Eph 1:23 then is associated with: (1) God's plan to unite τὰ πάντα in Christ; and (2) the risen Christ's cosmic victory over the powers. The depiction of the risen Christ in v. 23 (the one "who fills all in all") then builds upon these two contextual features of Eph 1:10–22 by suggesting that while Christ has already conquered the powers, the Father's ultimate goal of cosmic unity is not yet complete. Paul's depiction of the Church in Eph 1:23 (as the earthly presence and representative of the risen Christ), in turn, gives the Christian community a significant role in expanding the impact of Christ's victory and advancing the new creation inaugurated by his sacrificial death. Paul's statements in Ephesians 1:23 thus introduce his conception

[22] E.g., Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 74–77; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 118–19; Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 83–85.

[23] See Hoehner for an extensive survey of secondary literature related to the meaning of the participle πληρουμένου in Eph 1:23 (*Ephesians*, 296–99).

[24] Cf. Barth, *Ephesians*, 205–9; C. Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in the Light of Its Historical Setting*, SNTSMS 63 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 82–85; R. Meyer, *Kirche und Mission im Epheserbrief*, SBS 86 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 44–48; J. Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, BNTC (New York: Continuum, 2001), 96; Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 79–83; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 114–15; G. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians* 5:21–33, BIS 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 242–45.

of the Church's identity in this letter and prepare the reader for his extended explanations of how the Church serves as Christ's "body" and "fullness" in Eph 4:11–16 and Eph 6:10–20 (see below).[25]

The final text that is relevant for establishing the literary context of Eph 3:2–13 is Eph 2:1–22. While Eph 2:1–22 comprises two distinct textual units, they are nonetheless linguistically and theologically related. More specifically, Eph 2:1–10 and Eph 2:11–22 are: (1) linguistically linked together through the presence of the "once-now" schema in vv. 1–4 and vv. 11–13; and (2) theologically connected as parallel accounts of new creation.[26] Ephesians 2:1–22 also builds upon the description of Christ's victory over the powers in Eph 1:20–22.[27] The literary relationship between these two texts suggests Eph 2 (broadly speaking) describes Paul's "enumeration of the triumphs of God in Christ demonstrating that the powers ruling the present evil age are indeed subject to the Lord Christ."[28] This triumph in Christ represents the outworking of the cosmic plan introduced in Eph 1:10 and is conveyed through: (1) the death-life imagery in Eph 2:1, 5; (2) the new creation language in Eph 2:10, 15; (3) the horizontal and vertical reconciliation depicted in Eph 2:11–18; and (4) the establishment of a new "temple" in Eph 2:19–22.

The Rhetorical Function of Ephesians 3:13a

Paul's comments in Eph 3:13a represent the climax of the digression and contain the key that unlocks the relationship between the digression and the remainder of the letter. The climactic nature of Eph 3:13a is principally evident in the introductory conjunction διό and the presence of an exhortation (αἰτοῦμαι μὴ ἐγκακεῖν). The conjunction διό functions as a coordinating inferential conjunction that introduces *independent*

[25] For now, it is worth noting that the proclamation of the gospel represents one of the means by which the Church serves as the "fullness" of Christ in both of these texts (cf. Eph 4:15; 6:17). Cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 119; Meyer, *Kirche und Mission*, 43–46, 140–41, 144–45. Additionally, the use of the noun εὐαγγέλιον in the LXX is relevant here since this background suggests the gospel is ultimately a proclamation of divine victory (cf. Isa 40:9; 52:7; 61:1; Eph 1:20–22).

[26] Ephesians 2:1–10 is primarily an anthropological and individualistic account of new creation in Christ, while vv. 11–22 focuses on a corporate depiction of new creation (cf. Eph 2:10, 15).

[27] Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 86–88; E. Best, "Dead in Trespasses and Sins (Eph 2:1)," *JSNT* 13 (1981): 14; T. Allen, "Exaltation and Solidarity with Christ: Ephesians 1:20 and 2:6," *JSNT* 28 (1986): 103–4.

[28] Gombis, "Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare," 405.

clauses.[29] As such, it presents the reader with statements that draw a "*deduction*, *conclusion*, or *summary* to the preceding discussion."[30] Additionally, the verb αἰτοῦμαι in v. 13a serves as a metacomment that explicitly draws attention to the request to not "lose heart."[31]

The question then becomes, "What is the extent of the prior context that Paul is reaching back to as he draws this inference?" Scholars generally conclude that Paul is drawing upon his entire argument within Eph 3:1–12, and this conclusion is warranted on the basis of four textual features.[32] First, the phrase ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου likely refers back to Paul's statement concerning his imprisonment (ἐγὼ Παῦλος ὁ δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστου) in v. 1. Second, the repetition of the phrase ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν from v. 1 binds v. 13 to v. 1. Third, and closely related to the preceding point, the abundant references to Paul's Gentile ministry in Eph 3:1–2, 5–9 indicate the exhortation in v. 13 draws heavily upon Paul's argument throughout this text. Fourth, the exhortation in v. 13 likely represents the apodosis within the first-class conditional sentence at the beginning of v. 2 (εἴ γε ἠκούσατε … αἰτοῦμαι μὴ ἐγκακεῖν ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν).[33]

In summary, Paul's statements in Eph 3:13a serve a vital role within this digression. More specifically, Eph 3:13a provides the reader with the appropriate logical conclusion to the argument presented in vv. 1–12.

The Content of Ephesians 3:2–12

The digression in Eph 3:2–13 is driven by Paul's reference to his imprisonment in v. 1, with a particular concern to clarify the phrase ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν (v. 1b). Scholars generally divide the digression into three

[29] BDAG, διό, 250.

[30] D. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 673. Cf. BDAG, διό, 250; BDF §451, 5.

[31] Runge offers the following definition of a metacomment: "When speakers stop saying what they are saying in order to comment on what is going to be said, speaking abstractly about it" (S. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010], 101). He suggests metacomments are a means of attracting attention to what is about to be stated and provide the author with a way of stating "the point less directly" than via an explicit imperative.

[32] Cf. B. Merkle, *Ephesians*, EGGNT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 85, 98; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 220; D. Clark, "Discourse Structure in Ephesians, with some Implications for Translators," *BT* 58 (2007): 47; contra, Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 191.

[33] Cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 181; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 467.

major sections: vv. 2–7, vv. 8–12, and v. 13.[34] The first section primarily focuses on the origin of Paul's apostleship and the content of his proclamation as "apostle to the Gentiles." The second section then addresses the respective roles of Paul and the Church within God's plan for cosmic unification (cf. Eph 1:9–10).

In large measure, Paul's comments in Eph 3:2–7 equate the "mystery" of vv. 3–6 with the divine "grace" God has tasked him with stewarding in v. 2. While the phrase εἴ γε ἠκούσατε in v. 2a syntactically contains the main subject and verb in this text, it is nonetheless semantically subordinate to the remainder of v. 2 (τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς) that contains the actual thrust of this text.[35] Paul presents himself in v. 2 as a recipient (τῆς δοθείσης μοι) of "the stewardship of God's grace" (τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ). These two phrases in v. 2 constitute the primary thrust of this section and are the principal focus of Paul's comments in vv. 3–7. The noun οἰκονομία in v. 2 pictures Paul as a recipient of the "responsibility of management," particularly the "managing" of God's grace to Gentiles.[36] The origin and nature of Paul's stewardship is then clarified in v. 3a via the phrase [ὅτι] κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνωρίσθη μοι τὸ μυστήριον.[37] After the parenthetical comments in vv. 3b–4 that inform the reader of the reality that Paul has already briefly described the nature of the divine μυστήριον, Paul then returns back to the primary topic of the digression at v. 5.[38] Paul first contrasts the prior hiddenness of the "mystery" with its current state of disclosure (v. 5). It is at v. 6 that Paul finally states the precise content of the "mystery," and in doing so clarifies the meaning of the phrase τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς.[39] According to v. 6, the mystery Paul is particularly tasked with revealing concerns the

[34] E.g., Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 168.

[35] Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 102. Somewhat similarly, vv. 3b–4 (καθὼς … ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστου) is a more obvious parenthetical comment in this text.

[36] BDAG, οἰκονομία, 697.

[37] Paul's comments in v. 3a likely refer back to his Damascus experience, yet they also build upon (once again) the statements concerning the divine plan in Eph 1:9–10. The noun μυστήριον is generally understood as a divine secret that was previously hidden but has now been revealed. E.g., see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 214, 428–34.

[38] The similarity in content between Eph 2:11–22 and Eph 3:3–6 suggests Paul is referring here to his statements in the former passage regarding the union of Jew and Gentile in Christ (cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 187; Baugh, *Ephesians*, 227–28).

[39] Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 103.

unifying work of the gospel that grants equal status to Jew and Gentile in Christ.[40] This first section of Paul's digression finally concludes in v. 7 with a parenthetical description (using language that evokes v. 2) of Paul's status as a διάκονος of the gospel through the operation of divine power.

Paul's comments in Eph 3:8–12 primarily focus on the nature and the ecclesiological/cosmic implications of his apostolic ministry. Paul first emphasizes the unmerited nature of his apostolic ministry (v. 8a) and does so in a manner that draws upon his comments in v. 7.[41] His self-deprecating comments in v. 8a are then followed by a two-fold summary of the purpose (conveyed via the infinitives εὐαγγελίσασθαι and φωτίσαι in vv. 8b–9) of his apostolic ministry. The first purpose of Paul's ministry according to v. 8b concerns the proclamation of τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ to Gentiles.[42] The second purpose Paul associates with his apostolic ministry in v. 9 involves the revelation (φωτίσαι) of God's "mystery" to all humanity and likely refers back to the "mystery" in vv. 3–6 (cf. Eph 1:9–10).[43] The next major step in Paul's argument is a statement concerning the ultimate purpose (ἵνα) of Paul's ministry (cf. v. 10).[44] According to v. 10, as Paul performs his role as apostle to the Gentiles, the multiethnic ἐκκλησία formed through the proclamation of the gospel provides

[40] Given the explanation of the "mystery" in v. 6, it is likely that the precise nature of the concealment of the "mystery" to the "sons of men" in v. 5a particularly pertains to the relationship between Jew and Gentile within the new covenant community. The OT certainly speaks to the salvation of Gentiles (cf. Isa 2:1–4; 49:5–6). Paul, however, here is suggesting the OT does not directly address the reality that God's plan for salvation history is for Gentiles to have a place of equality with Jews in the Messiah (cf. Gal 3:28; Eph 2:15; Col 3:11). Cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 197–98, 203.

[41] Paul's comments in v. 8 are closely linked to v. 7 through: (1) the repetition of the noun χάρις and the verb δίδωμι; and (2) the pronoun αὕτη.

[42] The noun πλοῦτος in v. 8b conveys the notion of abundance and is used elsewhere in this letter to point to the "lavish nature of God's relationship to his people" (Eph 1:7, 18; 2:7). Cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 213. When correlated with Jesus Christ in this text, the noun πλοῦτος would then refer to the limitless grace (cf. Eph. 1:7; 2:7) that "belongs" to Jesus Christ and is found in union with Jesus Christ.

[43] Paul creates a number of intratextual allusions back to Eph 1:9–10 at this point in the digression. The primary parallels between these two texts include: (1) the noun οἰκονομία (1:10; 3:9); (2) the noun μυστήριον (1:9; 3:9); (3) the phrase τὰ πάντα (1:10; 3:9); (4) the verb γνωρίζω (1:9; 3:10); (5) language evocative of the powers (1:10; 3:10); and (6) the references to the heavenly realm (1:10; 3:10). Cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 197; Best, *Ephesians*, 322; Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 105, n. 17.

[44] Cf. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 94.

concrete evidence of the realization of God's plan for cosmic unity.[45] Paul then clarifies the revelation of God's "manifold wisdom" in v. 11 by suggesting it conforms (κατά) to the eternal plan he has orchestrated "in Christ Jesus" (cf. Eph 1:10). This portion of the digression then concludes in v. 12 with a parenthetical comment concerning the work of Christ. Paul here shifts from explaining his own personal involvement in the divine plan to highlighting the implications of Christ's sacrifice for all Christ-followers. According to v. 12, Christ's faithfulness (διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτου) grants his followers (including Paul) "boldness and access with confidence" (cf. Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 6:19).[46]

Paul's Message in Ephesians 3:13a

What then is the nature of Paul's plea in Eph 3:13a? While the emphasis in Paul's exhortation lies with the infinitive ἐγκακεῖν, it is necessary to account first for the grammatical ambiguity created by the absence of an explicit direct object for the finite verb αἰτοῦμαι and an explicit subject for the infinitive ἐγκακεῖν. Generally speaking, interpreters have offered four solutions to explain the syntactical imprecision in Eph 3:13a. First, some have argued Paul is asking God to help him not become discouraged.[47] Second, it has been argued that Paul is asking the Ephesians to pray on his behalf that he would not become discouraged by his imprisonment.[48] Third, M. Barth suggests Paul is here

[45] Cf. Arnold, *Ephesians*, 196–97; Hoehner, *Ephesians,* 459, 462. Some scholars argue the phrase "through the church" indicates God's people are involved in actively proclaiming the gospel to the powers (cf. W. Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 89–96; Barth, *Ephesians*, 363–66). There are two significant problems with this reading of v. 10: (1) the "rulers and authorities" in v. 10 are likely evil angels (cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 216); and (2) the passive verb γνωρισθῇ indicates this revelation is actually happening through God himself, not his people.

[46] The objective reading of the phrase τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ in Eph 3:12 is admittedly the reading preferred by most commentators. See Merkle for a summary of the arguments in favor of a subjective reading of τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ in v. 12 (*Ephesians*, 98). While Merkle himself prefers the objective reading, he does state "[t]hough the obj. gen. is slightly more likely, the subj. gen. cannot be ruled out" (*Ephesians*, 98). Finally, the dominance of the objective reading in v. 12 could stem from the lack of attention to the meaning of the infinitive ἐγκακεῖν in Eph 3:13 (see below).

[47] E.g., Sellin, *Epheser*, 270–71; Clark, "Discourse Structure," 47–48.

[48] Cf. G. Thompson, "Eph 3,13 and 2 Tim 2,10 in the Light of Col 1,24," *ExpTim* 71 (1959–60): 188.

asking *God* to help the Ephesians not become discouraged by his imprisonment.[49] Fourth, and finally, the vast majority of interpreters have concluded Paul is here asking *the Ephesians* that they not become discouraged as a result of his imprisonment.[50]

In general, there are sufficient grounds for following the scholarly consensus on this issue. The first and second options, in particular, are problematic because they fail to account for Paul's positive outlook on his suffering and imprisonment within the immediate context of Eph 3:13b, the broader context of Eph 3:1–12, and the wider context of the Pauline corpus (cf. Rom 8:18–39; 2 Cor 1:6; 4:1; Phil 1:20–30; Col 1:24).[51] The proposals that construe Eph 3:13a as a prayer to God are, furthermore, problematic on grammatical and syntactical grounds. More specifically, if Paul's statements in v. 13 were intended to be understood as expressing the content of a prayer of any sort, a coordinating conjunction such as καί would likely precede the explicit introduction of a prayer at the beginning of v. 14.[52] Additionally, if v. 13 is the apodosis of the conditional statement in v. 2, it would then be incoherent (given the content of v. 2) for the apostle to express a prayer request in v. 13.[53] Furthermore, if v. 13 is the apodosis of the conditional statement in v. 2, since v. 2 is explicitly addressed to the believers in Ephesus (εἴ γε ἠκούσατε), the direct object of the αἰτοῦμαι must then also be understood as the believers in Ephesus. Finally, and perhaps most decisively, the absence of an accusative personal pronoun ὑμας or some form of first-person pronoun attached to the infinitive ἐγκακεῖν in Eph 3:13a suggests the direct object of the main verb and the subject of the infinitive are identical; this then rules out the first three options. In summary, the most plausible reading of Eph 3:13a (in a general sense) is that Paul is here

[49] Barth, *Ephesians*, 348.

[50] E.g., Merkle, *Ephesians*, 98–99; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 468–69; Best, *Ephesians*, 330–31; W. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 57; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 191; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 199; S. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 113–14.

[51] Within the wider context of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul's personal request to the Ephesian church in Eph 6:19–20 (καὶ ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ … ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ παρρησιάσωμαι ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι) may be understood as a personal acknowledgement of his own despondency as a result of his imprisonment. Such a reading of v. 20, however, would not sufficiently account for the immediate context of Eph 6:10–18, where Paul has outlined a variety of spiritual resources that enable the believer to "stand against the schemes of the Devil" (v. 11).

[52] Larkin, *Ephesians*, 57.

[53] Fowl, *Ephesians*, 114.

"sufferings" on their behalf.[54]

A careful analysis of the infinitive ἐγκακεῖν further clarifies Paul's message to the Ephesian believers in Eph 3:13a. The infinitive ἐγκακεῖν is a form of the Greek verb ἐγκακέω. Commentators generally associate the verb ἐγκακέω with an emotional response of something akin to discouragement. Hoehner, for example, suggests the verb ἐγκακέω means to "grow weary or lose heart."[55] While the emotional response of discouragement is certainly an aspect of the verb's meaning, BDAG offers two definitions of the verb ἐγκακέω ("to lose one's motivation in continuing a desirable pattern of conduct" or "to be afraid in the face of a great difficulty")" and supports the former.[56] While BDAG notes "some" scholars favor the second definition, a close examination of the four other uses of the Greek verb ἐγκακέω in the Pauline corpus suggests the referent of this verb involves two particular components: (1) an emotional response akin to discouragement or fear; and (2) the cessation of a certain activity.[57]

While not as obvious as in some other texts, the correlation between action and emotional response associated with the verb ἐγκακέω is nonetheless present in 2 Cor 4:1. Paul's statements in 2 Cor 4:1 play a key role in his defense of his apostolic ministry within 2 Cor 1–7. The significance of 2 Cor 4:1 within Paul's argument is particularly evident in the retrospective phrase διὰ τοῦτο, which likely picks up on Paul's description of authentic Christian ministry in 2 Cor 2:14–3:18.[58] This connection between 2 Cor 4:1–6 and the preceding discussion of genuine Christian ministry is particularly evident in the phrase ἔχοντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην (v. 1). The διακονία Paul is likely referring to, after all, is almost certainly the new covenant ministry depicted in 2 Cor 3. Paul's statements in 2 Cor 4:1 are thus drawing a logical inference (signaled by the phrase διὰ τοῦτο) that is grounded in his description of new covenant ministry in 2 Cor 2:14–3:18. The logical inference that Paul is pointing the reader towards in 2 Cor 4:1 is his own personal determination to "not lose heart," even in the face of opposition. Once again, the wider context of 2 Cor 2:14–3:18 indicates the verb ἐγκακέω establishes a close connection between an action (persistence in genuine Christian ministry) and an

[54] The clause ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου in v. 13a should likely be understood causally. Cf. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 99.

[55] Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 468.

[56] BDAG, ἐγκακέω, 272. LN provides a similar definition: "to lose one's motivation to accomplish some valid goal" (ἐγκακέω, 319).

[57] BDAG, ἐγκακέω, 272.

[58] J. Lambrecht, "Structure and Line of Thought in 2 Corinthians 2,14–4,6," in *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, BETL 112 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 261–62.

emotional state (the absence of discouragement).

Paul's use of the verb ἐγκακέω in 2 Cor 4:16, once again, establishes a link between action and emotion. Paul again highlights his willingness to engage in bold speech in v. 13 (cf. 2 Cor 3:12) and then presents a two-fold rationale in vv. 14–15 for his courage, even in the face of difficult circumstances. Concerning Paul's use of the verb ἐγκακέω in 2 Cor 4:16, it is the knowledge of eschatological hope (v. 14) and the external nature (both human and divine) of his motivation in v. 15 that undergirds Paul's response of perseverance (διὸ οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν) in 2 Cor 4:16a.[59] Paul's logic in 2 Cor 4:16 is thus similar to his reasoning in 2 Cor 4:1. That is, according to 2 Cor 4:16, boldly persevering in ministry (action) rather than giving in to discouragement (emotional response) is possible in Christian ministry, despite the very real presence of hardship and danger.

The close correlation between emotional response and action associated with the verb ἐγκακέω is also clearly present in Gal 6:9.[60] Paul's statements in Gal 6:9 are somewhat loosely connected to vv. 7–8 through the coordinating conjunction δέ.[61] More specifically, Paul seems to build upon the reminder of eschatological judgment in v. 7 and the explication of that warning in v. 8 by urging believers to persist in orienting their lives around the work of the Spirit.[62] Since the participle ποιοῦντες (together with the nominal phrase τὸ … καλὸν) likely functions as a complementary participle that clarifies the sense of the verb ἐγκακέω, the link between action (the pursuit of a life centered on sacrificially serving others by the power of the Spirit; cf. Gal 5:13–14, 16, 18) and emotional response (here, the absence of enthusiasm for godly conduct) once again continues.[63]

The final use of the verb ἐγκακέω within the Pauline tradition occurs in 2 Thess 3:13. Paul's statements in v. 13 are part of his paraenesis concerning how to deal with those "walking in idleness" (v. 6) in 2 Thess

[59] The inferential conjunction διό states (much like in Eph 3:13a) a logical conclusion or deduction from Paul's argument in vv. 13–15.

[60] Paul's statements in Gal 6:9 form part of his overall discussion of the believer's duty to exercise their freedom in the Spirit by lovingly serving one another (Gal 5:13–6:10).

[61] The conjunction δέ in Gal 6:9 likely signals an important development in Paul's argument within this text. See Runge on the discourse function of δέ (*Discourse Grammar*, 28–36).

[62] Within the context of this letter (particularly in light of the concluding nature of Gal 6:1–10), the phrase τὸ δὲ καλὸν ποιοῦντες μὴ ἐγκακῶμεν in v. 9 is likely a summary of all that is urged upon the Christ-follower concerning life in the Spirit in Gal 5:13–6:10.

[63] The participle ἐκλυόμενοι in v. 9 is a close synonym of the verb ἐγκακῶμεν and heightens Paul's stress on perseverance in the life of faith.

3:6–15.[64] At v. 13, Paul shifts from confronting the ἀτάκτως in vv. 11–12 to addressing the majority of believers in the Thessalonian church that are not engaged in disruptive behavior. The participle καλοποιοῦντες in v. 13 clarifies Paul's admonition to the faithful believers in Thessalonica and specifies the object of the verb ἐγκακήσητε.[65] Second Thessalonians 3:13 is then a plea to faithful Christ-followers to not allow the indolence of the idle to hamper their motivation to financially assist others (cf. 1 Thess 5:15). Paul's usage of the verb ἐγκακέω in 2 Thess 3:13 then once again brings together the active pursuit of a certain course of action (engage in generous giving) and an emotional response (maintain a fervent longing despite the presence of discouragement).

Returning back to Eph 3:13a, the flow of Paul's argument in vv. 2–12 suggests Paul is again bringing together the cessation of a certain activity with a negative emotional reaction. Broadly speaking, Paul focuses on two central ideas in the digression within Eph 3:2–12 … the divine origin of his apostleship (vv. 2–7) and his responsibilities as "apostle to the Gentiles," along with their earthly and cosmic impact (vv. 8–12).[66] Both of these claims demonstrate the authenticity of his apostleship and involvement in God's plan for cosmic unification (cf. Eph 1:10). At the same time, there are three important features within Eph 3:8–12 that should be accounted for: (1) the presence of a number of allusions to Eph 1:9–10 (see above); (2) Paul's shift in focus from himself as "apostle to the Gentiles" to the Christian community in v. 10; and (3) Paul's statement concerning the impact of Christ's faithfulness in v. 12b. Thus, while the statements in Eph 3:2–12 principally focus on Paul's role in the *anakephalaiōsis* of "all things" (cf. Eph 1:10), Paul makes a clear transition in v. 10 away from himself to the responsibility of the wider Christian

[64] The specific cause for idleness among the ἀτάκτως is a topic of much scholarly debate. Given the absence of specific information concerning their identity, G. Fee's cautious conclusion concerning the cause of their behavior is worth noting: "we simply do not know; and in fact getting an answer to this question would hardly affect our understanding of the text at all" (*The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 325).

[65] The participle καλοποιοῦντες in v. 13 carries the same sense as the combination of the nominal phrase τὸ … καλόν and the participle ποιοῦντες in Gal 6:9. The correspondence between these two texts, however, should not be overstated. Second Thessalonians 3:6–15, after all, addresses a much more specific problem.

[66] Cf. Caragounis, *Ephesian Mysterion*, 73–74; Gombis, "Ephesians 3:2–13," 318–19; Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 104–5.

community and the work of Christ.[67] Ephesians 3:10–12 thus collectively emphasizes the Church's and Christ's roles in the *anakephalaiōsis* of Eph 1:10. Additionally, Eph 3:12 provides the reader with a subtle reminder of Christ's divinely-ordained suffering and places this entire discussion of Christian ministry within the framework of cruciformity. The digression's climax in Eph 3:13a then clarifies the purpose of Paul's transition at v. 10. More specifically, the exhortation in Eph 3:13a urges the reader to not allow Paul's own cruciform suffering to undermine their willingness to participate (cruciformly) in God's mission.

Reading the digression in Eph 3:2–13 with Paul's description of the identity and mission of the Church in Eph 1:23, clarifies the overall logic of this text. Paul's statements in vv. 2–12 are intended to counter any potential negative response to his self-description as "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (v. 1) that might lead a Christ-follower to ignore the portrait of the Church in Eph 1:23. By establishing the divine origin of his apostleship (vv. 2–7), as well as the nature and consequences of his ministry, Paul thus attributes his imprisonment to the sovereign will and plan of God (cf. Phil 1:16).[68] The exhortation in Eph 3:13a then builds upon the argument within vv. 2–12 by encouraging Christ-followers to respond to any fear that may result from the reference to Paul's suffering in v. 1 by considering the argument within vv. 2–12.

The Function of Paul's Plea for Perseverance within the Letter

An important aspect of Paul's discussion of the Church's mission in Ephesians is the opposition it will experience as it faithfully pursues its calling as Christ's "body" and "fullness" (cf. Eph 1:10, 20–22; 3:1, 10; 4:14; 6:10–20).[69] These references to hostility throughout the letter are part of the foundational motivation behind Paul's plea "to not lose heart" in Eph 3:13a. Admittedly, other Pauline letters (particularly 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and 2 Timothy) place much greater emphasis on suffering

[67] Paul's shift to the first-person plural verb ἔχομεν in Eph 3:12 is worth noting in that it highlights the implications of the gospel (cf. Eph 2:18) for both him (even in the midst of suffering) and the reader. The sudden shift to a first-person plural verb in v. 12 highlights for the reader the reality that Paul's imprisonment does not negatively affect his status as a beneficiary of Christ's reconciling work. In context, Eph 3:12 therefore presents an implied encouragement to embrace hostility from the unbelieving world.

[68] Cf. Baugh, *Ephesians*, 212; Fowl, *Ephesians*, 114.

[69] Paul's argument in this letter then grounds opposition to him and the Christian community in the cosmic nature of the *anakephalaiōsis* in Eph 1:10 and the opposition Christ himself experienced at the hands of the powers (implicit in Eph 1:20–22).

and encouraging Christ-followers to accept suffering for the sake of the gospel. Nonetheless, Paul's own experience in the city of Ephesus is indicative of the latent hostility that Christ-followers could experience in first century Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:22–41).[70]

Correlating Eph 3:2–13 with Paul's discussion of the Church's mission throughout this letter also clarifies the relationship between this digression and the preceding textual unit (Eph 2:11–22). While some scholars argue the introductory phrase τούτου χάριν in Eph 3:1 builds upon Eph 2:11–22, various literary considerations suggest Paul's point of departure at Eph 3:1 is particularly his description of the Church as an expanding "temple" in Eph 2:19–22.[71] The missional significance of God's dwelling place (the central notion underlying temples in the biblical framework) within the story of Scripture likely forms the impetus for the missionally motivated digression in Eph 3:2–13 and Paul's prayer in Eph 3:1, 14–19.[72] Paul's train of thought in Eph 2:19–3:19 thus proceeds in the following manner:

- a missional depiction of the Church as a burgeoning "temple" (Eph 2:19–22);
- an introduction to a prayer (Eph 3:1);
- a validation of the divine origin of his suffering (vv. 2–12) and an exhortation towards missional living (v. 13) that is motivated by the reference to suffering in v. 1 (Eph 3:2–13);
- a resumption of the prayer initiated in v. 1 (Eph 3:14–19).[73]

Paul's plea to be the "fullness of Christ" in the face of opposition particularly lays a foundation for Eph 4:11–16 and Eph 6:10–20. Both of these texts are extended descriptions of how the Church is to live out its role as Christ's "body" and "fullness" (cf. Eph 1:23). Importantly, Paul's description of the Church's ministry in Eph 4:11–16 is grounded in and

[70] See P. Trebilco for a helpful discussion of the historical reliability of Luke's account of Paul's time in Ephesus (*The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, WUNT 66 [Tübingen: Mohr Seibeck, 2004], 104–7).

[71] Cf. Merkle, *Ephesians*, 86; Larkin, *Ephesians*, 48; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 191; Sellin, *Epheser*, 248; Sherwood, "Paul's Imprisonment as the Glory of the *Ethnē*," 98. The dynamic nature of the "temple" in Eph 2:19–22 is principally evident in v. 21.

[72] See G. Beale for further discussion of the missional nature of the temple ("Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *JETS* 48 [2005]: esp. 29–31).

[73] On the literary connection between Eph 2:19–22 and Eph 3:14–19, see R. L. Foster, "'A Temple in the Lord Filled to the Fullness of God': Context and Intertextuality (Eph 3:19)," *NovT* 49 (2007): 86–88; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 167.

flows directly out of his description of Christ's own ministry (via incarnation, exaltation, and gift-giving) in Eph 4:7–10.[74] Additionally, the presence of the phrase ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα in Eph 4:10 closely associates these two related texts with the *anakephalaiōsis* of Eph 1:10 and the description of the Church in Eph 1:23. These observations indicate Paul's description of the efforts of the gifted leaders in v. 11 and the ἁγίων of v. 12 are to be understood as part of God's plan for cosmic unification.[75] The ministerial goals of unity and growth towards maturity in v. 13 then comprise key features of the divine plan. Paul's references to false-teaching in Eph 4:14 ("every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes"), generally speaking, depict heterodoxy as a threat and impediment to the objectives outlined in v. 13.[76] While there are no direct references to false-teachers in the letter, the presence of the noun μεθοδεία in both v. 14 and Eph 6:11 does suggest Paul envisions "the powers of darkness as actively inspiring various forms of dangerous teaching (Gal 4:8–10; 2 Cor 11:13–15; Col 2:8)."[77] Paul thus pictures heresy as part of the opposition to the divine plan for cosmic unity in Christ put forward by the powers.

Two related preliminary issues concerning Eph 6:10–20 require attention before examining the relationship between Eph 3:2–13 and Eph 6:10–20. First, scholars often view Paul's statements in Eph 6:10–20 as a concluding summary to the body of this letter.[78] The patent emphasis Paul places on the Church's conflict with the powers then confirms the prominence of this theme within the letter. Second, while spiritual warfare is generally conceived of as a solo affair involving a single believer's

[74] The repetition of the verb δίδωμι in Eph 4:7, 8, 11 binds Eph 4:7–10 to Eph 4:11–16. Cf. Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 173–74; Best, *Ephesians*, 375.

[75] The lexical links between Eph 2:19–22 and Eph 4:11–16 (οἰκοδομή, Eph 2:21//οἰκοδομήν, Eph 4:12, 16; αὔξει, in Eph 2:21//αὐξήσωμεν, Eph 4:15; συναρμολογουμένη, Eph 2:21//συναρμολογούμενον, Eph 4:16) also suggest the latter text explains the manner in which the Christian community's growth occurs. Cf. Foster, "Temple," 86–88, 95; M. Sterling, "Transformed Walking and Missional Temple Building: Discipleship in Ephesians," *Presb* 45 (2019): 90–91.

[76] At the same time, this ἵνα clause in v. 14 also likely modifies the verb ἔδωκεν in v. 11 and expresses a negative purpose underlying the giving of the gifted leaders in v. 11 (Merkle, *Ephesians*, 131; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 560).

[77] Arnold, *Ephesians*, 268. Cf. Schnackenburg, *Epheser*, 190.

[78] A. Lincoln's analysis of this text is particularly helpful in this regard, though his suggestion that Paul constructs this text as a *peroratio* modelled after speeches delivered by military generals is problematic ("'Stand, Therefore …': Ephesians 6:10–20 as a Peroratio," *BibInt* 3 [1995]: 102–9). Cf. L. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 407–8; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 411–14.

confrontation with malevolent cosmic forces, this is not an entirely accurate way of conceiving Paul's depiction of the Church's conflict with the powers in *this* text. This incomplete account of spiritual warfare in Eph 6:10–20 fails to account for this text's rhetorical function as a summary of the entire letter, particularly its new creation theme and discussion of the Church's mission.[79] Ultimately, Eph 6:10–20 serves as an explanation (along with Eph 4:11–16) of how Christ's σῶμα is to execute its task of serving as his πλήρωμα (cf. Eph 1:23).[80]

Four textual features within Eph 6:10–20 clarify how this text builds upon Eph 3:2–13. First, Paul's exhortation to "be strong in the Lord" within the midst of this cosmic struggle (v. 10) is conceptually similar to Paul's plea "to not lose heart" in Eph 3:13 in that both are related to his concern for faithful service in God's plan (even in the midst of external pressure) within this letter.[81] Second, given the interplay within the Bible's story between the forces of cosmic evil and human governments, it is no mere coincidence that Paul refers to the powers in Eph 3:10.[82] It is certainly within the realm of possibility that Paul would assign some measure of responsibility to the powers for his imprisonment. Third, the frequent connection Paul draws between donning the divine armor and the ability to "stand" and "withstand" in this passage (vv. 11, 13, 14) is also pertinent to this discussion since the verbs ἵστημι and ἀνθίστημι in this text point to the reality of cosmic opposition. Fourth, as a summary of the letter, one of the contributions of Eph 6:10–20 then is that it builds upon the rather general admonition to "not lose heart" in Eph 3:13 by pointing to the availability of divine resources (the "whole armor of God") that will enable God's people to participate in his plan for cosmic unification (cf. Eph 1:10, 23).

In summary, Paul's plea for perseverance in faithful ministry within Eph 3:13 anticipates the references to opposition within Eph 4:11–16 and Eph 6:10–20. The description of the Church in Eph 1:23 thus plays a critical role in the rhetorical development of this letter. Yet, before Paul explains how the Church is to serve as Christ's σῶμα and πλήρωμα, his own experience with opposition from the powers leads him to present a theological account of his apostolic ministry in Eph 3:2–12 and, on the

[79] M. Owens, "Spiritual Warfare and the Church's Mission according to Ephesians 6:10–17," *TynB* 67 (2016): 87–88. Cf. Cohick, *Ephesians*, 408–9.

[80] Owens, "Spiritual Warfare," 101–3.

[81] The passive imperative ἐνδυναμοῦσθε in Eph 6:10 likely has an active sense, though the passive voice is intended to communicate the reality that this empowerment comes from an external source (cf. Thielman, *Ephesians*, 417; Merkle, *Ephesians*, 210).

[82] Cf. Deut 32:8–9; Ps 82:1–8; Dan 10:12–14, 20–21; 12:1; 1 Cor 2:6–8; 8:5.

basis of those statements, exhort Christ-followers to resist the temptation to yield to external opposition.

Conclusion

The digression in Eph 3:2–13 weds together two central issues within this rich letter. First, Paul's discussion of the Church's mission in Eph 1:23 and Eph 2:19–22. Second, Paul's brief references to opposition within two key texts that provide more extensive descriptions of the Church's mission (cf. Eph 4:11–16; 6:10–17). Rather than *primarily* functioning as a defense of Paul's apostleship, as some claim, Paul's statements in Eph 3:2–12 closely correlate his ministry with divine agency, describe his ministry as the "apostle to the Gentiles," and explicate the far-reaching consequences of his ministry. Through these statements in Eph 3:2–12, the apostle assuages any concern the reader might have about his imprisonment by establishing God's sovereignty over his ministry and current situation. Paul then points the reader to the logical conclusion of his digression by imploring the reader to persist in faithful Christian service (Eph 3:13a), despite his own present hardship. The exhortation in Eph 3:13a then prepares the reader to embrace "the work of ministry" and "be strong in the Lord," even in the face of opposition (cf. Eph 4:12, 14; 6:10–17).

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STR 14.1 (Spring 2023): 23–44

A Theology of Wealth from the Book of James

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Abstract: *Many cultures in the twenty-first century display a pervasive love of wealth. The poverty gap has widened, not only between rich and poor nations, but also among the citizens within those nations. As the world continues to reel from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that Christians reexamine what the Bible teaches about wealth. Arguably, no New Testament book speaks more directly to wealth and poverty than the book of James. This article will provide a summary interpretation and application of the poverty and wealth passages of James in light of the socio-economic context of the first century. The first section considers relevant background material including the social historical context. The second section concentrates on James's most explicit passages on wealth: (1) 1:9–11; (2) 2:1–7, 8–9, 14–16; (3) 4:13–17; and (4) 5:1–6. The final section synthesizes five prominent theological themes from James's teaching on wealth.*

Key Words: *economic divide, James, oppression, poor, poverty, rich, social historical context, wealth*

Many cultures in the twenty-first century display a pervasive love of wealth. The poverty gap has widened, not only between rich and poor nations, but also among the citizens within those nations.[1] Patrick Henry, a senior writer at the World Economic Forum, explains that the global pandemic and the war in Ukraine have only accelerated and exacerbated the disparity between the rich and the poor.[2] Followers of Christ must turn to Scripture to discern how they should live in such a world, but where should they look? The book of James may be the best place to start, because as Ralph Martin has observed, "No [other] NT document … has such a socially sensitized conscience and so explicitly champions the cause of the economically disadvantaged, the victims of oppression or unjust

[1] Kevin H. O'Rourke, "Globalization and Inequality: Historical Trends," National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 8339, June 2001, http://www.nber.org/papers/w8339.

[2] Patrick Henry, "Economic inequality has deepened during the pandemic. That doesn't mean it can't be fixed," World Economic Forum, 7 April 2022, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/04/economic-inequality-wealth-gap-pandemic/.

wage agreements, and the poor who are seen in the widows and orphans who have no legal defender to speak up for their rights [as the book of James]."[3] This article will provide a summary interpretation and application of the poverty and wealth passages of James in light of the socio-economic context of the first century. The first section considers relevant background material including the social historical context. The second section concentrates on James's most explicit passages on wealth: (1) 1:9–11; (2) 2:1–7, 8–9, 14–16; (3) 4:13–17; and (4) 5:1–6. The final section synthesizes five prominent theological themes from James's teaching on wealth.

Social Historical Context[4]

The social stratification that James passionately opposed did not spring up overnight. The social and economic divide that existed in the first century owed much of its heritage to Hellenism.[5] Pedrito Maynard-Reid claims, "[T]he world under the Hellenistic rulers reached a level of capitalistic organization in agriculture, industry, and commercial trading that was not evident prior to the period and that Rome could not surpass."[6] Furthermore, these Graeco-Macedonian policies and culture, which spread through the Middle Eastern world during the period after Alexander, deliberately exploited subject territories.[7] The Romans, after conquering the Greeks, continued the same economic governing policies with little modification.[8] Helen Rhee explains that "enormous and structural inequalities constituted the very fabric of sociopolitical stratifications

[3] Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), lxvii.

[4] For a concise and helpful summary of scholarship on the economy of Roman Palestine, see Philip Harland, "The Economy of First-Century Palestine: State of the Scholarly Discussion," in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches*, ed. Anthony J. Blasi, et al. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002), 511–27.

[5] Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 13.

[6] Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James*, 14.

[7] Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church: Aspects of a Social History of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 15.

[8] Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James*, 15–16. Erich Gruen argues that Roman influence over the Hellenistic world did not come about in a linear or gradual fashion. Gruen stresses both Rome's receptivity to compatible Hellenic principles and the Greeks' benefit from Roman presence in a familiar system (*The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome*, vol. 2 [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984], 730). See Mary T. Boatwright, *Peoples of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 65–98.

and the values that governed the economic behaviors of various social groups [in the Roman empire]."[9] Social stratification revolved around three criteria: (1) Power (through position and acquisition of property and wealth), (2) Privilege (in legal, socioeconomic, and political realms), and (3) Prestige (social esteem and influence).[10]

Although the *Pax Romana* increased trade and commerce in Palestine, it also brought with it the negative consequences of increased social stratification.[11] The upper class greatly benefited from the economic growth made possible by the extended period of peace and order, but the economic situation for the common person became increasingly worse.[12] Recent studies have moved beyond Geza Alföldy's thesis that the elite consisted of 1 percent of the population and possessed the vast majority of the Roman Empire's wealth, while the other 99 percent lived at or below the poverty line.[13] Steven Friesen, for example, has proposed a seven-tiered poverty scale to describe the wealth distribution of the Roman Empire.[14] Though the details of his original proposal have been rightly critiqued, Friesen's more nuanced treatment of the data has greatly improved our understanding of the economic context of the Roman Empire

[9] Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 6.

[10] Ekkehard W. Stegemann, *Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 60–65.

[11] Harland notes that the agrarian economy in Palestine largely mirrors the general character of the economy in the greater Roman Empire ("The Economy of First-Century Palestine," 515).

[12] Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James*, 18. For an overview of how the Roman Empire's policy of imperialism and expansion favored the wealthy elite over the poor, see Peter F. Bang "Predation," in *Roman Economy*, ed. Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 197–217. Samuel Dickey comments, "The peace of Imperial Rome, its roads, its protection of trade and intercommunication, its orderly administration by experienced officials, its practical abandonment of the tax-farming system, its elimination of the old uncertainty from life and business, brought two hundred years of general prosperity. But it was not a uniform prosperity; still less was it an equality. For a time at least opportunities were offered to the lower classes to rise in the social scale.… But as a whole the fact remains that Roman magnificence was built on the inadequately requited toil of her laboring masses" ("Some Economic and Social Conditions of Asia Minor Affecting the Expansion of Christianity," in *Studies in Early Christianity*, ed. Shirley Jackson Case [New York: The Century Co., 1928], 402).

[13] Geza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1985), 146.

[14] Steven J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323–61.

in the first century.[15] In these studies, estimates for the number of people in poverty can range from percentages in the eighties or nineties, but what remains clear is that a vast percentage of the population of the Greco-Roman world lived near or in poverty.[16]

Much of the socioeconomic stratification present in the first century can also be described in terms of an urban-rural divide.[17] The rural and agrarian setting of most of the inhabitants of Palestine stood in strong contrast to the perceived superiority of the urban setting. It is not surprising that as cities grew and increased their trade, an agrarian society would give way to an urban one.[18] A growing population in first-century Palestine forced many men who were not firstborn to work as tradesmen, unskilled laborers, or slaves. Peter Davids points out that even the eldest sons who received land as an inheritance often lacked the resources to retain that land. Small plots, poor harvests, high taxation, drought, and wealthy landowners could force a man off his land. His options were then to move to the city in search of work or to become a hired laborer or tenant farmer—sometimes on the land he had previously owned.[19] The accumulation of wealth in the cities further increased the economic

[15] For a critique of Friesen's influential hypothesis, see John Barclay, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: A Response to Steven Friesen," *JSNT* 26.3 (2004): 363–66; Peter Oakes, "Constructing Poverty Scales for Graeco-Roman Society: A Response to Steven Friesen's 'Poverty in Pauline Studies,'" *JSNT* 26.3 (2004): 367–71; Walter Scheidel and Steven J. Friesen, "The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire," *JRS* 99 (2009): 61–91; Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 44–59.

[16] David J. Downs, "Economics, Taxes, and Tithes," in *The World of the New Testament*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 160.

[17] D. E. Oakman, "Economics of Palestine," ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 305. For a thorough description of the urban-rural divide, see Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 28–56.

[18] Martin Dibelius, *James*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1976), 41. See also Oakman, "Economics of Palestine," 305. For an alternative view of the economy of Roman Palestine, see Downs, "Economics, Taxes, and Tithes," 160–62. See also W. V. Harris, *Rome's Imperial Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27–56.

[19] Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 32. For a more thorough treatment of the socioeconomic context of the wealthy landowners and the plights faced by the poor day workers, see Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James*, 81–98.

divide, resulting in increasing feelings of contempt and acts of oppression by the wealthy urban citizens against the lower class and rural poor.[20]

This is the socioeconomic context of the early church. Undoubtedly, James was sensitive to the needs of the poor since he had seen and experienced many of these issues within his own congregation. He wanted to make sure that Christians were doing their part to take care of the poor and oppressed.[21] It is no small wonder that James dedicated nearly one quarter of his letter to the subject of wealth.[22]

James on Wealth

James 1:9–11

In 1:9–11, James introduces the topic of wealth to his audience and this passage is characterized by the contrast between the ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός ("the lowly brother") and the ὁ πλούσιος ("the rich one").[23] Ordinarily, ὁ ταπεινός does not refer to an impoverished person, but rather

[20] Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James*, 22.

[21] Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Hebrews, James and Jude* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2007), 402.

[22] According to Peter Davids, "47 verses out of the 105 in the letter, or close to 45%, have an economic theme" ("The Test of Wealth," in *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tensions in Early Christianity*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans [Leiden: Brill, 2005], 355). In the Nestle Aland 28th edition, James contains 108 verses. Whereas Davids's paper considers the larger passages in which wealth is discussed in James, this article focuses more narrowly on the verses that explicitly discuss wealth and economic status: 1:9–11, 27; 2:1–7, 8–9, 14–16; 4:13–17; and 5:1–6. These 26 verses constitute just over 24 percent of the epistle. Regardless of whether one argues that James speaks on economic themes in 24 or 45 percent of the letter, the fact remains that wealth is a significant topic for James.

[23] One of the most highly contested issues in the book of James is whether the rich people addressed are Christians or non-Christians. The problem results from James's ambiguous language concerning representatives of two groups of people in 1:9–11: (1) ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὁ ταπεινός "the lowly brother," and (2) ὁ πλούσιος "the rich one." Throughout the letter of James πλούσιος refers to material wealth, and 1:9–11 makes a clear contrast between the material wealth of the rich person and the lack of wealth of the lowly brother. Rather than linking the lowly brother with humiliation and the rich one with exaltation (which would have been the cultural expectation), James reverses their standing. Paradoxically, the lowly brother should "boast in his exaltation," while the rich one should boast "in his humiliation." The ἀδελφός clearly belongs to the believing community that James is addressing. Chris A. Vlachos, *James*, EGGNT (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 32–33. But what about the ὁ πλούσιος?

Some recent commentators have argued that James consistently presents the poor as believers, who belong to the community, and the rich as unbelievers in his book. See Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James*, 40–47; Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter and Jude*, 51; Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James*, 24–26. Davids argues that the term πλούσιος is only used to present the rich as persecutors. When James refers to wealthy believers, he does not use the term πλούσιος, but rather describes the person in a way that reveals his wealth (*A Theology of James, Peter and Jude*, 51 n. 69). Douglas J. Moo summarizes some of the main arguments for interpreting the rich as unbelievers: "James 5:1–6 pronounces judgment upon the rich generally, and that 1:10b–11 identifies the 'humiliation' of the rich person with condemnation in the last judgment" (*James*, TNTC [Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2009], 92). Maynard-Reid observes that if James believes the rich are non-Christians, then the humiliation in 1:10–11 must be interpreted as ironic (*Poverty and Wealth in James*, 42). Dibelius provides a translation of such an ironic boast: "The rich man has had his day; all he can expect from the future is humiliation; that is the only thing left for him to 'boast about.' This then would be some 'boast'!" (*James*, 85).

Though there is some credence to this position, several problems exist. First, Vlachos demonstrates that since the adjective πλούσιος ("rich") is in the substantival position with no noun to qualify, "it seems natural to supply ἀδελφός from v. 9 even as the syntax demands that καυχάομαι in v. 9 be brought over to v. 10" (*James*, 33). The parallelism linking verse 9 and verse 10 make the repetition of ἀδελφός unnecessary. Understanding ὁ πλούσιος as a rich member (or brother) of the community seems much more likely. See A. K. M. Adam, *James: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 11. Second, there is evidence that wealthy Christians appear throughout the book of James. Dan McCartney points out that at the very least, a few rich people had some form of relationship with the community, "or else passages such as 2:1–4 would be unnecessary" (*James*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009], 98). James 4:13–17 likely refers to wealthy Christians, or at least to a mixed Christian and Jewish audience. When planning for the future, James exhorts the merchants to acknowledge that God is ultimately in control and has the right to change their plans. See Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 60; and Dale C. Allison Jr., *James*, ICC (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 645–47. Third, as Blomberg argues, "[T]hat only the negative consequences of being rich are mentioned is not surprising given the antithetical parallelism with verse 9 in which only the positive benefits for the brother 'in humble circumstances' are mentioned" (*Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 150). Fourth, H. H. Drake Williams demonstrates the presence of an intertextual echo of Jer 9:23–24 in verses 9–11, which sheds light on both the identity and the boasting of the rich. In light of Jer 9:23–24, this boasting should be understood not as ironic, but as a "heroic boast." He asserts, "Despite poverty or wealth, Christians ought to

to lowliness and humility. It can, however, also denote someone who has a lowly social status or a humble attitude. Since James clearly contrasts the lowly brother with the rich, it is apparent that he is speaking to those in a humble socio-economic position.[24] Thus, in 1:9–11, James presents a contrast between two opposing worldviews. The first values people from God's perspective, whereas the second values people according to worldly values of wealth and social rank.[25] Chris Vlachos claims that the "chiastic structure [of 1:9–11] highlights the paradoxical nature of the logic."[26] The audience's inclination would naturally connect ὁ ταπεινός with boasting ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ ("in his humiliation") and ὁ πλούσιος with boasting ἐν τῷ ὕψει αὐτοῦ ("in his exaltation"). That "the lowly brother" (ὁ ταπεινός) is a cognate with "humiliation" (ταπεινώσει) further highlights this paradox.[27] Surprisingly, however, James urges the lowly brother to boast in his exaltation and the rich to boast in humiliation.[28]

In the midst of their sufferings and low socioeconomic status,

see their situations eschatologically—when wealth and poverty fade away" ("Of Rags and Riches: The Benefits of Hearing Jeremiah 9:23–24 within James 1:9–11," *TynBul* 53.2 [2002]: 282). This boast can only be interpreted as a heroic boast if the rich are included among the believers. If the rich are non-believers, the boasting must be interpreted as ironic. James Hardy Ropes argues that the "excess of fierce irony" makes the ironic interpretation unlikely (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, ICC [New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916], 146). Blomberg and Kamell agree that an ironic boast, in light of the rich person's eternal damnation, is too implausible (*James*, 58). The identity of the rich is certainly a complex issue. In light of the textual and contextual evidence, this article follows the understanding of Moo and tentatively concludes that the rich people in 1:10–11 and 4:13–17 are Christians and the rich landowners in 5:1–6 are not Christians (*James*, 90).

[24] McCartney, *James*, 95.

[25] Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 51.

[26] Vlachos, *James*, 32.

[27] Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 51.

[28] The verb James uses for boasting, καυχάομαι, is normally used with a negative connotation in the New Testament relating to pride and arrogance (see Rom 2:23; 1 Cor 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 13:3; 2 Cor 5:12; 10:16; 11:12, 18; Gal 6:13; Jas 4:16; see also Martin, *James*, 25). The LXX, the Old Testament Apocrypha, and the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, however, regularly use καυχάομαι with a positive sense of rejoicing in or glorying in God (see LXX 1 Sam 2:10; LXX 1 Chron 16:35; LXX Ps 5:12; 31:11; 149:5; Sir 39:8; 50:20; Pss. Sol. 17:1; and Jer 9:24). Interestingly, in Sir 24:1–2 it is personified wisdom herself who "boasts" in the midst of her people and before the power of the Most High. Even Paul uses καυχάομαι to speak of boasting in God (Rom 2:17; 5:11), in the Lord (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 2:17), and in Christ Jesus (Gal 6:14, Paul boasts in the cross of Christ; Phil 3:3). Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 76.

Christians should take pride and joy in their high position before God. James's use of ὕψος ("high position") alludes to the heavenly realm. Thus, James most likely urges Christians to boast both (1) in their confidence that they belong to the heavenly realm in the present through their faith and (2) in the certainty of Christ's return from the heavenly realm.[29] Juxtaposed to the lowly boasting in exaltation, James exhorts the rich to boast ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ. Questioning whether it would make sense for a person to glory in physical destitution, Craig Blomberg and Miriam Kamell assert that James must intend a spiritual humbling in 1:10a.[30] By boasting in their humiliation, rich believers acknowledge that what matters is not their standing before men, but their standing before God. Furthermore, such humility may also indicate identification with Jesus Christ, who humbled himself and was rejected as the least by the world.[31]

Verse 11 further describes what James means by "passing away" in verse 10.[32] The image of flowers rapidly withering under the heat of the sun was certainly familiar to his audience.[33] The force of the imagery here is not apocalyptic. Instead, James makes use of routine occurrences in the plant life of Palestine.[34] Though the imagery of fading flowers and grass can be found throughout the Psalms and prophets, the phrase ἄνθος χόρτου ("flower of the grass") which James uses in 1:10 is only found in the LXX of Isa 40:6.[35] James uses the agricultural simile to draw an analogy

[29] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 87.

[30] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 55.

[31] Moo, *James*, 93.

[32] Vlachos, *James*, 34, observes that the verb παρελεύσεται ("will pass away") is never used in the New Testament to refer to judgment. Παρέρχομαι is usually used in one of several ways: (1) to pass by in terms of spatial movement (Matt 8:28; Mark 6:48; Luke 18:37; Acts 16:8); (2) to pass away or to come to an end (Matt 5:18 [x2]; 14:15; 24:34–35 [x3]; Mark 13:30–31 [x3]; Luke 16:17; 21:32–33 [x3]; Acts 27:9; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Pet 4:3; 2 Pet 3:10); (3) to avert something (Matt 26:39, 42; Mark 14:35); (4) to neglect something (Luke 11:42; 15:29); and (5) to arrive or come near (Luke 12:37; 17:7). None of these uses refer to temporal or eschatological judgment. Furthermore, seventeen of the twenty-eight occurrences of παρέρχομαι (not including the occurrence in Jas 1:10) are used to indicate something passing away or coming to an end. For further treatment, see BDAG, "παρέρχομαι," 775–76.

[33] Moo, *James*, 93–94.

[34] Brosend, *James and Jude*, 43.

[35] Brosend, *James and Jude*, 40–41; Nelson R. Morales, *Poor and Rich in James: A Relevance Theory Approach to James's Use of the Old Testament* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 76–102. The same phrase ἄνθος χόρτου appears also in 1 Pet

between the transient nature of the flower and the momentary life of the rich person.

James 2:1–7, 8–9, 14–17

James 2:1–7 elaborates on the topic of wealth by addressing how believers and the church should treat both the wealthy and poor. The phrase ἐν προσωπολημψίαις ("in partiality") is fronted for emphasis in 2:1. The plural form likely suggests that James is referring to actions that surface due to favoritism, rather than a mere disposition toward it.[36] Though it does not appear in either secular Greek or the LXX, προσωπολημψίαις ("partiality" or "favoritism") does appear with its cognates in Acts and Paul (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Col 3:25; Eph 6:9).[37] Προσωπολημψίαις is a composite word based on the LXX phrase, πρόσωπον λαμβάνειν, likely from Lev 19:15, which James later alludes to in 2:8–9.[38] James here uses προσωπολημψίαις to refer to a judgment based on social/economic appearances.[39] For James it is impossible for a person to "hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (2:1) and

1:24. The author of 1 Peter, like James, is also dependent upon LXX Isa 40:6–8. See Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 125–30; John H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 389–94.

[36] Adam, *James*, 35–36.

[37] Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 105; Dibelius, *James*, 126.

[38] Morales, *Poor and Rich in James*, 140–43. See also Allison, *James*, 379–81. Commenting on πρόσωπον λαμβάνειν—occurring in Gal 2:6—J. B. Lightfoot rightly points out that the Hebrew phrase נשא פנים, which underlies both πρόσωπον λαμβάνειν and προσωπολημψίαις, can carry a positive sense of "receiving kindly" or "looking favorably upon" someone. When this Hebrew phrase is translated as "an independent Greek phrase however, the bad sense attaches to it, owing to the secondary meaning of πρόσωπον as 'a mask,' so that πρόσωπον λαμβάνειν signifies 'to regard the external circumstances of a man,' his rank, wealth, etc., as opposed to his real intrinsic character. Thus, in the New Testament it has always a bad sense. Hence a new set of words προσωπολήμπτης, προσωπολημπτεῖν, etc. which appear to occur there for the first time" (*The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 108). For a thorough and convincing argument on James's use of Leviticus 19 (and most importantly for this argument at 2:1, 8, 9), see Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *JBL* 101.3 (1982): 391–401; Pierre Keith, "La citation de Lv 19,18b en Jc 2,1–13," in *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition*, ed. J. Schlosser (Leuven: Leuven University Press 2004), 227–48.

[39] Vlachos, *James*, 67.

simultaneously show partiality to certain groups of people.[40]

James 2:2–4 contains a single sentence, illustrating a situation that further unpacks the problem presented in 2:1. These verses form a third-class conditional sentence, with verses 2–3 forming the protasis and verse 4 forming the apodosis. Though such a construction often depicts a hypothetical situation, the specifics of the illustration, what follows in verses 6–7, and the prepositional phrase ἐν προσωπολημψίαις in verse 1 might suggest that James is reflecting upon real events.[41] The purpose of the illustration is to present a striking contrast between two extreme groups of people who enter their assembly: the wealthy and the poor.[42] From context it appears that both men are probably visitors since they are both directed to their seats.[43] The gold ring and fine clothing mark the wealthy person as someone who possessed both social rank and money. The man's ostentatious style would have clashed harshly with the largely poor audience.[44] The term ῥυπαρᾷ ("shabby" or "filthy")—which James uses to describe the poor person's clothing further emphasizes the

[40] The phrase τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης is notoriously difficult to interpret. Rejecting the necessity of an interpolation, Dibelius offers three plausible interpretations, preferring the third: (1) "Faith in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," (2) "Faith in our Lord of glory, Jesus Christ," and (3) "Faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (*James*, 126–28). In addition to providing a convincing defense for the inclusion of ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, Davids also opts for Dibelius's third interpretation (*James*, 106–7). For a more thorough treatment of the issues associated with this phrase and for an argument for omitting ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, see Allison, *James*, 382–84.

[41] McCartney, *James*, 137–38.

[42] James uses συναγωγή rather than ἐκκλησία to describe the assembly of these believers. Dibelieus rightly cautions scholars not to overinterpret the term συναγωγή, or infer specifics regarding the time or place of the events of Jas 2:1–9. The term συναγωγή was used in a variety of ways in the early stages of Christianity. It could refer to the Jewish synagogue but could also designate a general meeting or assembly (see Dibelius, *James*, 132–34). McCartney believes James is clearly speaking of a "Christian gathering, to which visitors rich or poor may come. If James is an early letter (prior to the completion of the rift with Judaism), then 'your synagogue' is perfectly understandable as a reference to an early Christian church's local gathering for worship" (*James*, 138). Though McCartney may overreach by arguing for dating this passage before the Christian split from Judaism, the context which James addresses in Jas 2:1–9 suggests that he is addressing a Christian gathering, regardless of the physical location of the actual meeting. See also Rainer Metzner, *Der Brief des Jakobus* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), 116–17; Allison, *James*, 385–88.

[43] Brosend, *James and Jude*, 58.

[44] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 107–8.

disparity between the two men.

Not only does James contrast the rich and poor men's appearances but also where they sat. The rich man is invited to sit in a ὧδε καλῶς ("good place"), whereas the poor person is told στῆθι ἢ κάθου ἐκεῖ ὑπὸ τὸ ὑποπόδιόν μου ("stand over there or sit down at my feet"), indicating his lowly status. James ends the conditional sentence with a rhetorical question that functions as a condemnation of the community's skewed faith and actions. The believers have discriminated among themselves and become judges with evil thoughts.

In Jas 2:5–7, James provides the proof as to why favoritism toward the wealthy and discrimination against the poor are incompatible with true faith. Verses 5–7 each contain a rhetorical question negated by οὐχ ("not"), indicating that James expects each question to be answered affirmatively. Yes, God has chosen the poor (2:5). Yes, the rich are the ones who oppress and drag believers to court (2:6). Yes, the rich dishonor the name by which believers are called (2:7). Advocates of liberation theology, however, have often taken verse 5 out of context. They apply their slogan, "God's preferential option for the poor," to Christian and non-Christian poor without discrimination.[45] James, however, explicitly communicates in the context of verse 5 that the poor who inherit the kingdom and are rich in faith are those who love him.[46] James does not identify all poor as being rich in faith. The present participle τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν ("those who love") suggests a continuous action by those James addresses: the lives of these poor are characterized by a constant love for God.[47] James contrasts God's choice of the poor with the audience's preference for the rich, highlighting three elements: (1) the rich oppress believers; (2) the rich drag believers to court; and (3) the rich blaspheme the good name invoked over believers.[48] This favoritism of the wealthy does not make rational sense, argues James. Nor does it make sense in light of God's commands.

In verses 8–9 James reminds his audience of the royal law, which he

[45] Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James*; Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James*; Julio de Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977); Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, eds., *Option for the Poor: Challenge to the Rich Countries* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986). See also Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: From Leo XIII to Pope Francis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016).

[46] Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 152.

[47] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 113.

[48] Brosend, *James and Jude*, 59. The "good name" could refer to (1) the name of God; (2) the name of Jesus; or (3) Christian morality and worship practices. See Moo, *The Letter of James*, 140.

quotes from Lev 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." For James, showing partiality to the wealthy and dishonoring the poor is about much more than displaying bad social manners. Rather, these prejudices reflect a clear violation of the command to love one's neighbor.[49] James continues arguing that if a person breaks one part of the law—by showing favoritism, for example—they have broken the entire law and are "convicted by the law as transgressors" (Jas 2:9).

The focus of Jas 2:14–17 is on ineffective faith. The illustration James uses to make his point involves an interaction between a wealthy and a poor member of the congregation, expressing that the way a person uses their wealth is a direct demonstration of their faith (or lack of faith).[50] The necessity of good works is further emphasized by the rhetorical questions in 2:14. These questions carry implied answers of "no good" and "no." No, faith without works is no good, nor can such faith save a person.

The situation James presents in 2:15–16 is a hypothetical one demonstrated by the governing particle ἐάν. It seems best to understand James as presenting a scenario that his audience would either likely encounter or could possibly experience. The prevalence of poverty in the first-century Roman Empire may suggest that James believed his audience would encounter such impoverished individuals. Regardless, the focus is not upon the likelihood of experiencing such a situation, but on the exhortation to good works.[51] No longer is James addressing someone outside of the community (as in 2:1–7), but rather those within the believing community. The picture James paints of the poor brother or sister is a desperate one. They are scantily clad and lack even the basic necessity of daily food. That the hypothetical believer sees and understands that their brother or sister is in need is evident from his response: ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε ("Go in peace, be warmed and filled).[52] In their pitiless refusal to meet even the most basic needs of

[49] Brosend, *James and Jude*, 59–60.

[50] Aída Besançon Spencer, *A Commentary on James* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 139.

[51] Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 121.

[52] There is some debate as to whether the verbs θερμαίνεσθε and χορτάζεσθε should be interpreted as middle or passive. Daniel B. Wallace argues that as passives ("be warm and be filled") the verbs suppress the agent for rhetorical affect and serve as an indictment of the brother who does not truly have faith (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008], 437). On the other hand Witherington contends that they should be understood as middle verbs ("warm yourself and fill yourself") (*Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 474). Blomberg and Kammel state, "If middle,

clothing and food, these self-proclaimed believers display extreme hypocrisy. James exhorts his audience to demonstrate their faith by action. Those who are able must meet the needs of their brothers and sisters who are in desperate need. If they do not, their faith is worthless; it is νεκρά, a corpse.[53]

James 4:13–17

James returns to the topic of wealth in 4:13–17 and focuses his attention on traveling merchants and businesspeople. He does not explicitly mention that they are rich. Their extensive travel plans, however, and their intentions to make money imply that they are at the very least moderately wealthy.[54] These merchants addressed here are also probably Christians. James rebukes them for living with a worldly perspective and urges them to acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty over their lives. He also admonishes them because they know what is right and fail to do it.[55] As in 1:9–11, James uses a metaphor in 4:14 to highlight the transience of human life: "For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." The wordplay between the similar sounding φαινομένη ("appears") and ἀφανιζομένη ("disappears") further emphasizes the transitory nature of life.[56] The "certainty" of their future planning is in reality nothing more than a mirage.

The problem that James addresses has nothing to do with wealth itself or with making a living as a merchant, but rather with the arrogant and presumptuous attitudes of the merchants. In their desire to become rich, they have traded a God-centered worldview for a worldly one.[57] Christian merchants, according to James, must consult the Lord in their business dealings (and all areas of life) and acknowledge his sovereignty and

the insult to the poor person merely becomes even more outrageous" (*James*, 131). Perhaps Dibelius is correct when he claims that "it makes no difference in this regard whether the imperatives here are understood as passive or as middle" (*James*, 153 n. 23). What matters for James is that believers demonstrate their faith by meeting the needs of others in love.

[53] McCartney, *James*, 157.

[54] Moo, *James*, 196.

[55] There would be no need to admonish these merchants, exhorting them to acknowledge God's sovereignty, if they were not Christian. For an argument for treating the merchants as believers, see Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 208; Davids, *James*, 171; Moo, *The Letter of James*, 254; McCartney, *James*, 225. For an interpretation that the merchants addressed could refer to a mixed Jewish and Christian audience, or to non-Christian Jews, see Allison, *James*, 647–49. See also McKnight, *James*, 369.

[56] Vlachos, *James*, 153.

[57] Martin, *James*, 165.

lordship over their lives. He urges them to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (4:15). James does not intend the phrase "if the Lord wills" to be used as a formula that should be repeated mindlessly, but rather an expression of a submissive attitude towards God.[58] James closes this section with verses 16–17—a condemnation of those who have correct knowledge and yet refuse to act upon that truth.

James 5:1–6

Moving from a hortatory to a denunciatory tone, Jas 5:1–6, presents arguably the most severe condemnations against the non-Christian rich who oppress the poor.[59] James's rhetorical style here closely resembles the Old Testament prophets and apocalyptists in their condemnation of the rich.[60] Witherington observes similarities to woe oracles and notes that the eschatological prospects of the non-Christian rich are very dim: "The rich are invited to view their funeral in advance. They should begin to weep … and wail … because of the miseries that are heading right their way."[61]

The "rich" that James attacks in this passage are identified in 5:4 as wealthy land-owners. These wealthy land owners were frequently the object of criticism of the Old Testament prophets, Jewish literature, and even the wider Greco-Roman world for their greed and willingness to exploit their laborers.[62] James uses the literary device known as an "apostrophe" to address the rich who are not physically present in his church.[63]

[58] Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 65.

[59] Vlachos, *James*, 158. See also Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 523.

[60] In particular, Martin references Isaiah—the condemnations of foreign nations in Isaiah 5, 13, 15, and 34—and 1 Enoch 94.7–11 (*James*, 172). He also mentions prophetic oracles against the rich and powerful in Israel (Isa 3:11–4:1; Amos 4:1–3; 6:1–7; Mic 3:1–4). The OT phrases and idioms Martin references, however, appear in passages that focus on condemning foreign nations rather than Israel (κλαίειν … ὀλολύζετε μετὰ κλαυθμοῦ, Isa 15:2, 3; ὀλολύζοντες, Isa 10:10 LXX; 13:6; 14:31; 15:2, 3, 5; 16:7; 23:1, 6, 14; Jer 31:20 LXX). Thus, the context of Jas 5:1–6 favors understanding the rich as non-Christian oppressors of the poor.

[61] Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 524.

[62] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 210. For a thorough description of absentee land ownership in the Roman Empire, see MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations*, 4–27.

[63] Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 157. See also Vlachos, *James*, 158. For an argument regarding the rich in Jas 5:1–6 as false believers within the Christian community, see Joseph K. Pak, "A Case for James's Condemnation of the Rich in James 5:1–6 as Addressing False Believers within the Believing Community," *JETS* 63.4 (2020): 721–37.

While James speaks directly to οἱ πλούσιοι, his purpose is not to call for a change among the rich. Rather the passage is intended to comfort and console the oppressed. The Lord of Hosts sees and knows their plight. One day their oppressors will face ultimate judgment before the Lord himself for their cruelty and wicked deeds.[64]

Verses 2–3 further expand upon the plight of the rich.[65] The worldly riches they have so carefully stored up have become worthless: "Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded" (5:2–3a). Significantly, James uses the perfect tense to describe what occurs to the hoarded wealth. These three perfect verbs are likely not futuristic, but rather consummative or extensive perfects. The riches have already lost their luster; they have already become rotten.[66] Though James has previously highlighted the transience of life, here he also describes wealth as temporal in nature. James certainly knew that neither gold nor silver could rust or corrode.[67] The image he presents is "deliberately jarring and all the more powerful if it reflects the metaphorical meaning of becoming useless."[68] The irony is thick as James explains that the silver and gold in which the rich placed their trust have turned against them, testifying on behalf of the righteous whom they have oppressed and exploited.

In verses 4–6 James shifts from a general condemnation of the rich for hoarding up wealth to specific charges against their wicked business methods and wanton living. The charges against the rich are fourfold: (1) they have withheld wages from their workers (5:4); (2) they have lived in luxury and self-indulgence (5:5a); (3) they have fattened their hearts for slaughter (5:5b); and (4) they have condemned and murdered the righteous person (5:6).[69] Witherington helpfully notes that the first and fourth charges the rich commit against other people, while the second and third they commit against themselves.[70]

[64] Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James*, 81–82.

[65] For helpful background context of the various miseries that come upon the rich, see Spencer, *A Commentary on James*, 250–53.

[66] Vlachos, *James*, 160.

[67] Though gold and silver do not corrode, they do become tarnished. Tarnish, however, does not destroy the item in question and can be cleaned off. Todd Scacewater argues based on linguistic evidence that James adapts his language in Jas 5:2–3 as he interacts with Jewish tradition, specifically Sirach 12:10–11; 29:8–12 ("The Dynamic and Righteous Use of Wealth in James 5:1–6," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 20.2 [2017]: 232–33). See also Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 525.

[68] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 221.

[69] Brosend, *James and Jude*, 134.

[70] Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians*, 528.

Unfortunately, oppression of the poor laborers was all too common in the first century. As mentioned above, many farmers were forced off of their lands by wealthy landowners and had to earn meager wages as day laborers. For those who were living at or below the subsistence level, prompt payment would have been critical for daily survival.[71] Withholding wages was a grievous sin not only against the worker, but against God himself.

Surprisingly, not only are the harvesters themselves crying out to God for justice, but so are the wages of the laborers (5:4). Passages such as Gen 4:10, Hab 2:11, and Luke 19:40 demonstrate that in unjust circumstances even inanimate objects can be described as calling out to God.[72] Most significantly, James indicates that these cries for justice "have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts" (5:4). The perfect tense of εἰσεληλύθασιν ("they have reached") suggests that the Lord of Hosts has already heard the cry and begun his judgment upon the rich.[73]

Not only do the rich commit wrongs against the poor, but they unknowingly commit wrongs against themselves. The selfishness with which they have hoarded their wealth and spent it on luxurious living ironically brings about their own demise (5:5).[74] Since there was no effective method of refrigeration in the first century, whenever an animal was slaughtered, people gorged themselves with meat. Whatever was left of the butchered animal had to be dried, salted, or discarded. [75] The rich, who enjoy such feasts by living in luxury and self-indulgence, fatten their hearts for a day of slaughter.

The "day of slaughter" is an image frequently used in the Prophets to allude to God's ultimate judgment.[76] Davids observes an ironic play on words in 5:5: "'The rich' are having their feast on their 'day of slaughter,' but they should be mourning, for unbeknown to them God's 'day of slaughter' has arrived."[77] God's eschatological judgment will bring about

[71] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 216.

[72] Brosend, *James and Jude*, 134. In Gen 4:10, blood cries out. In Hab 2:11, the stones cry out. Luke 19:40 is an allusion to Hab 2:11.

[73] Martin, *James*, 179; McCartney, *James*, 234. For an overview and helpful bibliography on the phrase "Lord of hosts," see T. N. D. Mettinger, "Yahweh Zebaoth," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 920–24.

[74] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 224.

[75] Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 66.

[76] For examples of prophetic uses of the "day of slaughter" as referring to the day of judgment, Allison refers readers to Isa 34:2–7; 65:12; Ezek 39:17–20; Zech 9:15; 11:4; Sib. Or. 5.375–400; Rev 19:17–21. Allison, *James*, 683 n. 297.

[77] Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 66.

a reversal of fortunes. Those who are exalted and have exalted themselves on earth will be brought low. The poor and oppressed will be raised up, for the Lord of hosts has heard their cries. This passage would have brought great hope to the believers who faced tremendous oppression.

Major Theological Themes and Practical Implications

The Transience of Life and Wealth (1:10–11; 4:14; 5:2–3)

James teaches us that both human life and wealth are momentary in light of eternity. Human life will pass away like a scorched flower or a vanishing mist (1:10–11; 4:14). Our wealth will rot away, and our possessions are easily destroyed (5:2–3). True wealth, according to James, cannot be found in temporary earthly treasures, but only in the eternal nature of God and his kingdom (2:5). From an eternal perspective, it makes no sense for Christians to be concerned with hoarding wealth. This world, including its wealth and resources, will pass away. No amount of wealth can replace the eternal security offered by Christ.[78]

Having a heavenly worldview changes the way Christians think about and use the resources the Lord has given them. For Christians, money cannot be an end in itself. Resources are a God-given means that we should use strategically with wisdom.[79] We must use our wealth in a way that promotes the growth of the kingdom, investing in works that intentionally help spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, both locally and worldwide. R. Paul Stevens and Clive Lim challenge us to use our money relationally, contributing to the unity and equality among the people of God.[80] In contrast to the greedy and self-seeking practices of the world, we ought to intentionally create communities that promote generosity and care for our neighbors.[81] Christians need to reject materialism and deliberately use their homes, resources, and money to invest in the lives of believers and non-believers. In this way they participate in the growth and

[78] Dewi Hughes, *Power and Poverty: Divine and Human Rule in a World of Need* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 145. See also Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 360–65.

[79] Scacewater, "The Dynamic and Righteous Use of Wealth in James 5:1–6," 236–37.

[80] R. Paul Stevens and Clive Lim, *Money Matters: Faith, Life, and Wealth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 131–32.

[81] Hak Joon Lee, *Christian Ethics: A New Covenant Model* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 326–27.

spread of the heavenly kingdom here on earth.[82]

Wealth and Works (1:27; 2:8, 14–16; 5:2–6)

One of James's most well-known teachings is that true faith results in good works. He argues that a faith without works is dead and useless (2:14–26). A Christian's good works include stewardship of the material blessings of the Lord. Thus, James questions the veracity of the faith of Christians who refuse to meet the dire needs of their fellow brothers or sisters (2:14–17; 5:1–6). For James, true religion is to care for the orphans and widows and resist the stain of the world (1:27). Hoarding wealth as an end in itself is an egregious sin against both God and the poor.

Not only should Christians intentionally invest in eternal things, but also we must work to meet the present needs of the less fortunate. Almsgiving and social justice work should not be done apart from the proclamation of the gospel. They are, however, necessary outgrowths of the gospel and proof of a transformed life.[83] Regardless of political beliefs, Christians across the spectrum are obligated to care for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized.[84] We need to become "just peacemakers" who seek both the spiritual and physical wellbeing of others and protect the economic rights of the poor and needy.[85] Space precludes an exhaustive list of ways to care for the poor. However, all Christians ought to prayerfully consider how God intends for them to use their wealth and resources to meet the needs of the poor.[86] If we are not willing to use our wealth to help others, we must seriously consider whether or not our faith is dead.

[82] Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); Stevens and Lim, *Money Matters*, 69–81; Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2010); Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[83] Craig Blomberg, "Paul and James on Wealth and Poverty: No Disagreement Here," *Presbyterion* 48.1 (2022): 131.

[84] Chad Brand and Tom Pratt, *Seeking the City: Wealth, Poverty, and Political Economy in Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 741–42.

[85] Lee, *Christian Ethics*, 325. See also Charles Reed, ed., *Development Matters: Christian Perspectives on Globalization* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001).

[86] For a helpful list of selected statements on just economy and wealth inequalities by protestant denominations and ecumenical organizations, see Elizabeth L. Hinson-Hasty, *The Problem of Wealth: A Christian Response to a Culture of Affluence* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), 227–29.

Oppression of the Poor (2:1–9; 5:1–6)

James does not mince words when addressing the atrocious treatment of the poor at the hands of the wealthy. He accuses them of committing fraud, withholding daily necessities from the needy, and murdering the righteous (5:1–6). Furthermore, James also condemns showing favoritism to the rich over the poor. By following worldly social conventions, these Christians have humiliated and disgraced the poor and transgressed the law of God (2:1–9).

Few Christians reading this article are likely to engage in affairs that actively oppress the poor. I pray that none of us are engaged in slavery, human trafficking, or any other horrific acts of exploitation that should not exist. James's epistle, however, not only condemns oppression, but, by implication, inaction as well. To engage the poor and oppressed in a meaningful way would make many Christians very uncomfortable. We will need to come face to face with drug addicts, prostitutes, orphans, immigrants, homeless, and many others who do not normally enter the front door of our churches. James commands us not to offer hollow platitudes, but to provide for their physical needs.[87] Meeting a person's most basic needs—food, clothing, clean water, healthcare, education, etc.— is a "fundamental moral demand."[88] To turn a blind eye to the needs of our communities is oppression.

The ever-increasing complexity of the world's marketplace further complicates our ability to make ethical monetary decisions.[89] With the majority of our purchases, we now engage a worldwide economy rather than a purely local one.[90] Not knowing where items come from, how they are produced, or the work conditions of the companies' laborers creates ethical dilemmas for us as consumers. When faced with such decisions, we tend to ignore ethical issues connected to the decision or make decisions based on incomplete information, rather than doing the necessary research to make educated and moral decisions.[91] With some

[87] For practical suggestions on how Christians can effectively engage poverty both locally and internationally, see Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 183–268. See also William H. Brackney, *Christian Voluntarism: Theology and Praxis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

[88] Lee, *Christian Ethics*, 320.

[89] For a positive critique of capitalism as an economic philosophy from a Christian worldview, see Fred Catherwood, *The Creation of Wealth: Recovering a Christian Understanding of Money, Work, and Ethics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2002).

[90] For a discussion on how increased globalization has increased inequality over the past two hundred years, see O'Rourke, "Globalization and Inequality."

[91] Brand and Pratt, *Seeking the City*, 700.

effort and research it is possible for us to determine which companies make reasonable efforts to provide fair wages and working conditions.[92] As Christians, we need to purchase from and invest in companies making socially conscious decisions and refuse to support those who oppress and exploit the poor.

Dependence on God (1:9–11; 2:5; 4:13–17; 5:1–6)

Perhaps the greatest danger of possessing wealth is that a rich person places his trust in his wealth and sees no need for God. James condemns this attitude and strongly exhorts Christians to place their faith in God and seek his will (1:9–11; 4:13–17). By living a life of self-indulgence founded upon trust in wealth, the rich condemn themselves to destruction (5:1–6). Those who love God, humble themselves, and place their faith in God rather than in worldly riches will inherit the kingdom of God (2:5).

The security of wealth is nothing more than a mirage, yet people take great comfort from their riches. Attempting to control the future and find certainty in the wealth it might bring is an attitude of extreme arrogance.[93] God alone knows and is sovereign over the future. Christians must therefore reject such self-centered arrogance and acknowledge the sovereignty of God and their utter dependence upon him. Furthermore, all of creation and its blessings are God's to distribute in his good providence. He does not owe us, nor are his blessings exclusively ours once he has given them to us.[94] We are merely stewards of these good gifts. We have the extreme privilege of joining God and participating in his kingdom work here on earth through the strategic use of our wealth and resources.[95] This perspective frees us from the temptation to amass

[92] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 234.

[93] Christopher W. Morgan, *A Theology of James: Wisdom for God's People*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 91.

[94] Kathryn Tanner, "Economies of Grace," in *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life*, ed. William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 375–77.

[95] In order to cultivate a life that acknowledges its dependence on God, Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, and Neil Wilson suggest avoiding these five attitudes regarding wealth: (1) imagining retirement in selfish terms as our time to enjoy the fruits of our labors; (2) seeing work and careers as ways we can make money in order to buy what we want; (3) defining money as a symbol of independence; (4) believing that we are in control of major areas of life; and (5) making practical decisions about education, job changes, moving, investments, and spending without serious prayer (*James*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, *Life Application Bible Commentary* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1992], 112).

wealth and trust in it instead of God's sovereign provision.[96]

The Great Reversal (1:9–11, 27; 2:5; 5:5–7)

James does not promote poverty as a mere ascetic discipline with no real hope. He exhorts Christians and those who are poor to persevere because there will be a great reversal in the end. Since Christ will return and both redeem and restore all of creation, the lowly brother can boast in his exaltation and the rich in his humiliation (1:9–11). Though wealth greatly affects a person's social standing in earthly kingdoms, it has no bearing on a person's standing in the heavenly kingdom (2:5). Those who trust in wealth will be met with a day of slaughter (5:5–7). Those who love God (2:5) and have kept themselves unstained by the world (1:27) will be rich in faith and heirs to the eschatological kingdom.

A proper eschatological perspective brings great hope to Christians who are suffering in this life and gives them strength to persevere. Wealth may offer temporary protection, but that safety is only illusionary. Christians can find great hope because their current social status is not indicative of their eternal standing before God. When Christ returns to redeem all things once and for all, it is not a person's wealth that will bring security, but their standing before God.[97] The wealthy will be humbled, and the poor will be raised up. Their true identity is not defined by earthly wealth, but by their identity as God's children redeemed by Christ. Furthermore, God himself has seen the plight of the poor and heard their cry. He will not refrain from bringing his justice upon the situation. Those who trusted in their wealth on earth will spend eternity separated from God, longing for his presence and entry into the kingdom of heaven. In contrast, those who have placed their trust in Christ will spend eternity in the presence of God, lacking nothing, and receiving infinitely more than this world could provide.

Conclusion

Though it may be an overstatement to refer to poverty and wealth as James's most important theme, this issue undeniably plays a significant

[96] Stevens and Lim, *Money Matters*, 103–9. See also Thorsten Moritz, "New Testament Voices for an Addicted Society," in *Christ and Consumerism: A Critical Analysis of the Spirit of the Age*, ed. Craig Bartholomew and Thorsten Moritz (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2000), 66–72.

[97] Mariam Kamell, "The Economics of Humility: The Rich and the Humble in James," in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 174–75.

role in the epistle. James exhibits a deep sympathy for Christians struggling to survive and retain their faith in an unforgiving and hostile environment. The theological significance of James's teaching on wealth lies in both his attack on the arrogant and oppressive rich and his encouragement of the poor and lowly.[98] According to Chester and Martin,

> [James] stands in essential continuity with the Old Testament prophetic tradition and the central thrust of Jesus' message of the kingdom. It lays bare the power interests involved in human relationships, actions, and words, and calls the bluff of falsely motivated action. Against this, it calls for genuine faith and concrete, practical action. Both for its own time, and also for the present day, it poses a challenge to society and to the Christian community.[99]

In a world where the deprivations of war and the aftermath of a global pandemic threaten to plunge many, many more into poverty, Christians have ample opportunity to demonstrate their faith by providing for the physical needs of the poor and destitute. James reveals that those who love God, who have humbled themselves, who have drawn near to him, who have kept themselves unstained by the world, and who have used their wealth to take care of the poor and oppressed, will be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom.

[98] Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin, *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 58.

[99] Chester and Martin, *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude*, 58.

STR 14.1 (Spring 2023): 45–65

"Discipleship": Clarifying Terms in the New Testament and Secondary Literature

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Abstract: *Contemporary discussions about the mission of the church and the activity of Christians center on the concept of "discipleship," but the term proves confusing if not defined and deployed with clarity. Authors use "discipleship" to describe a variety of activities ranging from personally following Jesus to helping others follow Jesus; moreover, some take "discipleship" to be synonymous with terms like "disciple-making" or "discipling" while others seek to distinguish the terms. Further complicating the issue, "discipleship" does not correspond to a particular word in the NT. Consequently, it is deployed by authors to encompass a diverse group of NT words, often with no criteria stated for how those terms relate to the concept of discipleship. There is no single category, much less a single term, under which these concepts can be subsumed. And perhaps that is one of the reasons that the term "discipleship" has taken on the function of being the overarching term for Christians helping other Christians grow, even if the term itself is not prominent in the NT. This article describes the terminological problem, demonstrates the breadth of NT terms describing the activity of helping others follow Jesus, and finally proposes a way forward in the use of these key terms.*

Key Words: *disciple, disciple-making, discipleship, Great Commission, preaching, teaching*

The term, "discipleship," holds a prominent place in most discussions of the church's mission. Every year Christian publishers roll out new discipleship resources. Conferences and journals use "discipleship" in their titles, and churches include staff who are given the title "Pastor of/for Discipleship." While most churchgoers would readily recognize "discipleship" as a common term, we are concerned that its use as an all-encompassing and often-undefined term for all things related to Christian growth has the potential to create confusion and sideline other significant NT terms.

One challenge with this popular Christian terminology is that

"discipleship" is a term that is not lexically connected to a particular word in the NT.[1] There is no Greek word that corresponds directly to "discipleship" nor does "discipleship" appear in modern English translations. But that observation, in itself, does not invalidate the term. It does, however, demand that we give special attention to how the term is used so that we can ensure that it is used in a "biblical" manner, accurately describing and summarizing biblical texts. The challenges are compounded by the variegated uses of "discipleship" in English writing. In contemporary Christian literature, "discipleship" can refer to faithfully living the Christian life, making converts, and what Christians do to help other Christians live the Christian life.[2] The various definitions are drawing on concepts in the NT, specifically the terms for being a "disciple" of Jesus and "making disciples" of others, both of which have corresponding words in the Greek NT: μαθητής and μαθητεύω. To muddy the waters further, some authors use the terms "discipling," "discipleship," or "disciple-making" for the very same actions of Christians helping other Christians live the Christian life.[3] Some authors have noted the challenges created by ill-defined terms. Mark Dever, for example, seeks to clarify this

[1] The term discipleship is derived from the common Latin word, *discipulus* meaning student or follower. The English suffix "-ship" typically refers to the state or quality of something. So if etymology were determinative, and it rarely is, "discipleship" would refer to the state of being a student.

[2] Michael J. Wilkins seeks to clarify terminology, "In common parlance, *discipleship* and *discipling* today relate to the ongoing life of the disciple. *Discipleship* is the ongoing process of growth as a disciple. *Discipling* implies the responsibility of disciples helping one another grow as disciples…. Thus, when we speak of Christian discipleship and discipling we are speaking of what it means to grow as a Christian in every area of life. Since *disciple* is a common referent for *Christian*, discipleship and discipling imply the process of becoming like Jesus Christ. Discipleship and discipling mean living a full human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image" (*Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 41).

[3] The titles of a few popular books illustrate these variegated uses. The writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, although being translated from the German, demand mention because of the immense influence they have on contemporary English usage. His work, entitled *Nachfolge*, has been translated into English initially as *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1959) and more recently as *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 4, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003). The German word communicates the general concept of "following" Jesus, and it has come into English as "discipleship." Mark Dever clarifies the scope of his work with the title, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016). Discipling, for Dever, is the activity of Christians in helping others grow spiritually.

terminological issue:

> That's the working definition of *discipling* for this book: helping others to follow Jesus. You can see it in the subtitle. Another way we could define discipling might be: discipling is deliberately doing spiritual good to someone so that he or she will be more like Christ. Disciple*ship* is the term I use to describe our own following Christ. Discipl*ing* is the subset of that, which is helping someone else follow Christ.[4]

Dever's book is quite helpful, but his approach illustrates another challenge with this topic. He makes a distinction between discipleship (which he defines as following Christ) and discipling (which he defines as helping others follow Christ). When he begins to discuss discipling, Matthew 28 (which uses the term "to disciple" or "to make disciples") is the launching point, but the discussion of discipling is substantiated through the NT Epistles without lexical reference to the term "discipling." This is unavoidable, but it is important to note that even among authors who are very careful with their terms, there are not always clean ties to particular NT words.[5]

[4] Dever, *Discipling*, 13 (emphasis original). Fernando F. Segovia provides further insight into how the term was defined at a symposium dedicated to the NT topic: "First of all, the term 'discipleship' quite clearly admits of a narrow as well as a broader definition. In the former sense, it is to be understood technically and exclusively in terms of the 'teacher' / 'disciple' relationship with all its accompanying and derivative terminology (for example, 'following' or 'on the way'). Such a restricted usage would have limited the symposium of necessity to a re-examination of the evidence in the Gospels and Acts as well as the pre-Gospel tradition. In the latter sense, discipleship would be understood more generally in terms of Christian existence—that is, the self-understanding of the early Christian believers as believers: what such a way of life requires, implies, and entails. Such a wider usage would then apply across the entire spectrum of the New Testament writings" ("Introduction: Call and Discipleship—Toward a Re-examination of the Shape and Character of Christian Existence in the New Testament," in *Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 2). See also the clarifying comments by Richard N. Longnecker, "Introduction," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longnecker, McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 1–7.

[5] Wilkins claims, "The consensus in the history of the church—ancient and modern—is that the concept of discipleship is apparent everywhere in the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation. While methods of inquiry vary, virtually all scholars agree that the concept of discipleship is present everywhere in the New Testament in related terminology, teachings, and metaphors" (*Following the Master*, 293). The question, of course, becomes how one determines what concepts constitute "discipleship" apart from the lexical connection.

This brief introduction has highlighted four challenges with the term "discipleship." (1) "Discipleship" is used in various ways in English. (2) "Discipleship" (like most every word with a semantic range) overlaps with other English terms, such as "discipling" and "disciple-making." (3) "Discipleship" does not correspond to any particular Greek term. (4) "Discipleship," as it appears in popular writing, encompasses a diverse group of Greek words, often with no criteria stated for how those terms relate to "discipleship." The approach of this article is to answer the following questions: How are "discipleship" and cognate terms used in the secondary literature? What are the NT terms describing the concept of "discipleship"? What are the implications?

How Are "Discipleship" and Cognate Terms Used in the Secondary Literature?

An oft-repeated observation about preaching is that a mist in the pulpit produces a fog in the pew. Similarly, lack of clarity in writing about discipleship affects the pulpit and thus confuses the pew. A brief, selective survey of recent literature intended to clarify the church's task of discipleship illustrates various and sometimes confusing usage of the word "discipleship." We are not claiming that these works are unhelpful (on the contrary, these are some of the most helpful and influential works in the field) or that every author is unclear. We merely intend to illustrate the tension and ambiguity with how "discipleship" is often deployed. As an illustrative overview, this is not exhaustive, so we have chosen some of the most influential and trajectory-setting works.

Robert Coleman

Robert Coleman greatly influenced the course of modern discussions about discipleship, particularly through his seminal work, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*.[6] Even the title of that work raises questions concerning how it became so influential in conversations about discipleship. Coleman's

[6] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1963). Coleman's work is in the line of A. B. Bruce's class work, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971). The original subtitle captures Bruce's thesis: "Passages out of the Gospels Exhibiting the Twelve Disciples of Jesus Under Discipline for the Apostleship." Bruce painstakingly traces Jesus's work with the twelve apostles from "occasional companions" to those chosen "to be witnesses in the world after He Himself had left it" (13–14). Most interestingly, Bruce avoids proscribing a detailed, lockstep training strategy on Jesus's part, but rather one of "unsystematic" and "occasional" lessons drawn from "the simple fact of being … with such a one as Jesus" (299).

basic approach is to apply Jesus's ministry strategies to the work of the church today. Yet, there persists within Coleman's work confusion concerning the relationship between evangelism and discipleship.[7] Coleman declares a goal of correcting problems in "evangelistic methods" by looking at the four Gospels for the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Note Coleman's explicit emphasis on evangelism while using phrases (e.g., "follow the way") that are more commonly associated with discipleship: these patterns "teach us how to follow the way of the Master" which in turn becomes a "textbook on evangelism."[8]

Some twenty-five years later, Coleman penned a follow-up book entitled *The Master Plan of Discipleship*.[9] In *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, he describes his former work: "Years ago I sought to trace the underlying strategy of Jesus's personal ministry…. That study in the four Gospels deduced some basic principles of *discipleship* by observing how our Lord ordered his life, my conviction being that his way established guidelines for his disciples to follow."[10] Ironically, Coleman describes a book he titled *The Master Plan of Evangelism* as "basic principles of discipleship" in his introduction to a second book he has titled *The Master Plan of Discipleship*. So what accounts for the difference in titles? While he does not treat evangelism and discipleship as synonymous, Coleman does emphasize their interconnectedness: "it follows that whatever form our evangelism takes, winning and training disciples to disciple others must have preeminence."[11] Coleman's two "Master" works also begin to introduce us to the implications of selecting a particular subset of the NT. Other than the titles, the major difference between Coleman's two books is the first's use of Jesus's personal discipleship training, whereas the second uses the early church in the book of Acts as a pattern for Great Commission ministry.

Bill Hull

Bill Hull's influence on the discussions about discipleship is evident in

[7] Reverend Paul Rees, writing the introduction to *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, distinguishes between "evangelistic specialists" like Moody, Sunday, or Graham and what he refers to as "disciple making" carried out by church and para-church ministries. Making an even sharper distinction between the two concepts, Rees differentiates "between the gospel to which we bear testimony and the life which the gospel enables us to live." Rees's introduction begs the question whether the book is focused on the former or the latter.

[8] Coleman, *Master Plan of Evangelism*, 10.

[9] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1987).

[10] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 14–15 (emphasis added).

[11] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 107.

the number of books he has published on the topic: *The Disciple-Making Pastor* (1988), *The Disciple-Making Church* (1990), *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker* (2004), *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (2006), *Conversion and Discipleship* (2016), *The Cost of Cheap Grace: Reclaiming the Value of Discipleship* (2020), and with Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel* (2018).[12] What is immediately clear even from Hull's titles is that he is seeking to define his terms. For example, the longer titles of both his 1988 and 1990 works describe disciple-making as leading others in the journey of faith. For the sake of clarity in his earlier works, Hull uses the terms "discipling" or "disciple-making" instead of "discipleship," which is the more flexible and thus vaguer term. When Hull does use the term "discipleship," he tends to use it as a more inclusive term.[13] The fuller title of his 2006 book illustrates this more inclusive use: *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. There are several definitions of terms implied in that title that he makes explicit in the book. "A disciple, then, is the normal Christian who follows Christ."[14] "Simply, discipleship means learning from and following a teacher."[15] He goes on to clarify, "*Discipleship*, the widely accepted term that describes the ongoing life of the disciple, also describes the broader Christian experience."[16] Hull uses the term "disciple-making" to describe the activity of creating and forming disciples in three primary dimensions: deliverance (i.e., evangelism), development (i.e., "teaching them to obey"), and deployment (sending the disciple on mission).[17] One of Hull's contributions to the field is to push for clarity in definitions.

[12] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1988); *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1990); *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006); *Conversion and Discipleship: You Can't Have One Without the Other* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016); *The Cost of Cheap Grace: Reclaiming the Value of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2020); Bill Hull and Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel: What Jesus Preached—We Must Follow* (HIM Publications, 2018).

[13] This trajectory is observable in his earlier works as well. For example, in his description of his approach to the issue, Hull notes the connection among being a disciple, observing Jesus's pattern of ministry, and doing the ministry of discipling: "We'll look at the biblical description of a disciple, the biblical model of a disciple maker—Jesus—and how disciple making became a part of the early church" (*The Disciple-Making Church*, 15).

[14] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 33.

[15] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 24.

[16] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 34.

[17] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 34.

Greg Ogden

While some of the influential writings in the mid to late twentieth century (e.g., Wilkins and Coleman) emphasized the Gospels to the near exclusion of the Epistles, the pendulum has begun to swing in the other direction; thus, there is a need for a wider canonical narrative as it relates to discipleship.[18] In *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, Greg Ogden carefully differentiates the discipleship language used by Jesus with the terminology found in Paul's letters. "Language running throughout the Gospels and Acts is absent in Paul's letters."[19] On the one hand, Ogden contrasts Jesus's discipleship rhetoric with Paul's spiritual formation language. Yet, on the other hand, Ogden resists creating discord or disagreement between stated goals and processes. "I see discipleship and spiritual formation as two sides of the same coin. Discipleship is about following Jesus. Spiritual formation is about the life of Jesus emerging from the inside out."[20] That observation and his explanation are helpful. In his subsequent work, *Discipleship Essentials*, Ogden moves from Jesus's approach of disciple-making to Paul's without noting the change in terminology between the two: "We see that the Apostle Paul adopted the same goal and methodology in his ministry that Jesus modeled. Paul's version of the Great Commission is his personal mission statement … [citation of Col 1:28–29] … Paul is so passionate about making disciples that he compares his agony over the maturity of the flock to the labor pains of a woman giving birth … [citation of Gal 4:19]."[21] He proceeds to describe Paul's approach to disciple-making as the multiplication strategy described in 2 Tim 2:2. It is important to note that Ogden has taken the shared concept of building into others who in turn build into others and borrowed the "disciple-making" term from the Great Commission to describe Paul's activity. While Ogden does at times seem to use discipling

[18] Ironically, Michael Bird has noted the reverse emphasis with Reformed Theology's overemphasis on the Epistles to the exclusion of the Gospels. He argues for the need for "canonical equity" by which he means that we need to read the entirety of the canon and not focus exclusively on a particular subset. ("Not by Paul Alone: The Importance of the Gospels for Reformed Theology and Discipleship," *Presbyterion* 39.2 [2013]: 98–112).

[19] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 95. From the title, it is evident that Ogden understands discipleship as Christians helping others to follow Christ.

[20] Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 218.

[21] Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 20–21.

interchangeably with discipleship, he is to be commended for clearly defining his terms and noting different terminological preferences among NT authors.[22]

Kevin Vanhoozer

Kevin Vanhoozer's more popular-level writing includes work on the pastoral task in the local church. His most recent work, *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor's Guide to Making Disciples Through Scripture and Doctrine*, clarifies both the task and means of pastoral ministry.[23] Vanhoozer describes "disciple-making" as the task of forming Christians, particularly through Scripture and doctrine, so that they are fit for purpose. Vanhoozer's work is rich with metaphors for the Christian life drawing on the realms of fitness, nutrition, medicine, theater, etc. Drawing on the metaphor of physical fitness, he states "it is important to remember that, while pastors may 'make' (that is, train) disciples, only God can 'wake' (that is, create) them. Discipleship is about becoming who we are in Christ, and this is entirely a work of God."[24] Vanhoozer continues, "Discipleship is essentially a matter of hearing (authority), believing (trust), and doing the truth (freedom) that is in Jesus Christ."[25] And more directly, he states, "Discipleship is a call, a vocation, to follow Jesus everywhere, before everyone, at every time."[26] So it seems that Vanhoozer defines "making disciples" as training Christians and "discipleship" as Christians following in the outworking of God's grace. But, at times, Vanhoozer's terms get confusing: "We might describe discipleship as the project of helping people to become fully awake and to stay awake, by which I mean alert to the opportunities and dangers of the Christian life."[27] In this quote, discipleship is the Christian

[22] In *Discipleship Essentials*, Ogden begins new chapters with definitions. "Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. The includes equipping the disciple to teach as well" (17).

[23] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor's Guide to Making Disciples Through Scripture and Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019).

[24] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 44.

[25] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 49–50.

[26] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 65 (cf. 85).

[27] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 54. The subsequent pages involve some terminological unclarity. "Making disciples is a step-by-step process of helping men and women to walk in the Way of Jesus Christ" (60). This definition is clear: "discipleship" is helping other to walk rightly. But the next sentence states, "It involves waking up to the Way, then setting out on it" (60). What is the "it" in the phrase "It involves"? If the "it" is to be understood as "discipleship," then

task of helping others.

An additional challenge emerges in the connection between disciple-making and the tasks by which one makes disciples. One of Vanhoozer's central concerns is rightly understanding what a pastor is and does: "A pastor does many things, but I have argued that most of these things are forms of ministering God's word: either by speaking (preaching, teaching, counseling, praying) or enacting it (celebrating the Lord's Supper, visitation). The particular focus of the present work has been on the pastor as disciple-maker, or what I have described elsewhere as 'public theologian'—one who does theology with and for *people*."[28] In this quote, we might ask what is the biblical connection between the idea of "disciple-making" and the activities that he lists? There is a connection in Matt 28:19–20 between making disciples and the activities of teaching and baptizing, but ironically Vanhoozer opts for the other ordinance, the Lord's Supper. Vanhoozer has made this conceptual connection between disciple-making and the listed activities not strictly based on a tight textual connections.

Observations

The purpose of this brief survey has been to illustrate that some confusion of terms exists in the secondary literature about "discipleship," "discipling," and "disciple-making." These representative authors use the terms differently, and at times, some of them deploy them in different ways within the same book. Additionally, it is not always clear how the authors move from the concept of "discipleship" or "disciple-making" to the various tasks associated with it. Often the connection between the term and activity (for example, preaching) is assumed but not made explicit.

What Are the NT Terms Describing the Concept of Discipleship?

Having described the flexibility of the term "discipleship" in secondary literature and the challenge of its connection to a particular Greek lexeme, we will explore the various NT words that could be contained within the *concept* of "discipleship" as it is popularly used. The popular use of "discipleship" is "to help others follow Christ."[29] One challenge is that

the first sentence defines discipleship as helping others while the second sentence defines discipleship as one personally following Jesus.

[28] Vanhoozer, *Hearers and Doers*, 241.

[29] In this section, we will use the noun "a disciple" to correspond to the Greek

the common use of the term "to disciple" is often disconnected from the particular NT lexeme μαθητεύω. Two data points will illustrate the tension between contemporary and NT usage. First, for such a sweeping term in contemporary literature, "to disciple," only occurs four times in the NT (Matt 13:52; 27:57; 28:19; Acts 14:21). Only Matt 28:19 and Acts 14:21 use μαθητεύω in the active voice, and the occurrence in Acts is participial. Second, both the verbal form "to disciple" (μαθητεύω, 4 times) and the noun form "disciple" (μαθητής, 261 times) are limited to the Gospels and Acts.[30] That calls into question if the contemporary term "discipleship / to disciple" accurately represents the NT data.[31]

This tension between NT and contemporary usage leaves us with the question, "What NT terms or concepts describe the activity of helping others follow Christ (i.e., 'discipleship')?" In answering this question, we are adopting the most common definition for "discipleship" in the secondary literature and then describing which Greek terms could be subsumed under that overarching concept. We must make a few qualifiers before the analysis. First, because there is such variation in the translation of some of these words, the analysis of these NT terms has been done in

noun μαθητής. We will use "to disciple" and the participial form "discipling" to correspond to the Greek verb μαθητεύω. This term has the advantage of being verbal and having the ability to be transitive (i.e., take a direct object) in English. And we will use the term "discipleship" to encompass the diverse terms relating to helping someone grow in Christ.

[30] Longnecker comments, "The most common designation in our canonical Gospels and Acts for one committed to Jesus—that is, for one who accepted his teaching and sought to be identified with him—is 'disciple' (*mathētēs*, literally 'pupil'/'learner,' from the verb *manthanein*, 'to learn'). Jesus's associates are called disciples in the Gospels; the (eleven) disciples are commanded to 'make disciples of all nations' in Matt 28:19; and believers generally are called disciples throughout Acts" ("Introduction," 2).

[31] Longnecker understands discipleship primarily in terms of following Christ and explains the absence of the term μαθητής in the rest of the NT, "Outside of the four Gospels, the Acts, and the one or two instances in the Apocalypse, however, 'disciple' and 'follower' are conspicuously absent in the rest of the New Testament. Rather, what we have elsewhere in the New Testament are (1) statements regarding the nature of authentic Christian existence, (2) exhortations urging that the truths of these statements be put into practice (often in Paul's letters, though also in 1 and 2 John, using the verb *peripatein*, 'to walk about' or 'to conduct one's life'), and (3) calls (either explicit or implied) for believers to be imitators (*mimētēs*, or with the verb *mimeomai*) and/or to reflect in their lives the 'example' or 'pattern' (*typos*, *hypotypōsis*) of the apostle Paul, of Jesus Christ, or even of God himself" ("Introduction," 5).

Greek, but we have made an effort not to make reference to Greek burdensome.[32] Second, space constraints have prevented us from providing a detailed analysis of any one text or lexeme. In some cases, a representative text is used to exemplify a more pervasive pattern. Third, we have not attempted to answer the question, "What is the author doing when he writes (encourage, exhort, etc.)?" other than when the author has explicitly stated his purpose. Our goal in the following sections is to illustrate the breadth and nuance of the various terms and ideas associated with discipleship (i.e., helping others to follow Jesus).

Use of μαθητεύω

Due to the understandable influence of the Great Commission, μαθητεύω has become a key term in discussions about discipleship, despite its infrequent occurrence. In contrast, the cognate noun, μαθητής, occurs over 250 times, exclusively in the Gospels and Acts. In Matt 28, Jesus uses an imperatival form of the verb transitively: μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ("make disciples of / disciple all nations").[33] For our study, the transitive use is significant because it denotes a difference between "being a disciple" and "making a disciple" with the latter being transitive. The act of making disciples is clarified to involve baptizing (βαπτίζω) and teaching (διδάσκω). Although lacking the imperatival force of Matt 28, Acts 14:21 also uses μαθητεύω actively: Εὐαγγελισάμενοί τε τὴν πόλιν ἐκείνην καὶ μαθητεύσαντες ἱκανοὺς ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν Λύστραν ("After they preached the gospel in that city and discipled many, they returned to Lystra"). This verse demonstrates the connection between preaching the gospel (sometimes translated "evangelize") and making disciples.[34] John 4:1 uses a different construction employing an indicative verb with a direct object (μαθητὰς ποιεῖ) to communicate a similar transitive idea. The Great Commission, as the final words of Jesus, has such significance in the minds of Christians, so that the absence of μαθητεύω from the Epistles seems surprising. But the term itself is not pervasive even in the Gospels. Are we to conclude that the rest of the NT writings make little of the concept of μαθητεύω because the term is absent from their writings?

[32] All English Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

[33] All references from the Greek text are taken from NA28.

[34] Both preaching the gospel and making disciples are aorist temporal participles communicating that they are antecedent to the return to Lystra, but it is not possible to state definitively if the participles themselves are understood to be contemporaneous or sequential. Some might have the impulse to claim that evangelism precedes discipleship, but that argument could not be sustained from the grammar alone.

Or are there terms that describe what it means to disciple or make disciples? In order to discuss how Christians live out the command to make disciples, we must look at other word groups to explain the manner of making disciples. The absence of the term μαθητεύω does not mean that the actions entailed in that term are absent.[35] As Jesus indicates, discipling will involve at least teaching and incorporating new believers into the church (baptism).

There might be a parallel between the term μαθητής in the Gospels and Acts and the term δοῦλος in the rest of the New Testament. In the Gospels and Acts, μαθητής is generally understood to be a term describing devotion to Christ and his teaching. The Gospels and Acts also use δοῦλος to describe complete devotion to Christ (e.g., Matt 10:24–25; Luke 2:29; John 13:16; 15:20; Acts 4:29; 16:17; in addition to the common theme in the parables).[36] While the rest of the NT does not use μαθητής, these writers describe Christians, and sometimes themselves, with the parallel concept of δοῦλος (Rom 1:1; 6:19; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 1:10; Eph 6:6; Phil 1:1; Col 4:12; 2 Tim 2:24; Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 2:16; 2 Pet 1:1; Jude 1; Rev 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 15:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6).[37] Additional terms like, "brother," "believer," and "saint" also seem to replace "disciple."[38]

Discipleship in the Gospels

When contemporary discipleship literature examines the Gospels, it tends toward one of two directions. Either Jesus is taken to be the disciple-maker *par excellence*, or the disciples are models (both positively and

[35] Bill Hull provides his reasoning for the legitimacy of the terms "disciple" and "disciple-making" even though they do not appear after Acts 21 (*The Disciple-Making Church*, 17–19).

[36] For more on the metaphor of δοῦλος in the NT, see Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*, NSBT 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[37] Peter H. Davids hints at this possibility in James: "The letter of James is another New Testament writing that never uses the terms 'disciple' or 'discipleship.' Yet 'to ask about discipleship in James,' as Luke Johnson points out, 'is really to ask about the shape of Christian existence' or an appropriate lifestyle for a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, it should then be seen that James has much to say on the topic. What follows, here, therefore, is a presentation of the pattern of an authentic Christian existence of lifestyle as portrayed in the letter attributed to 'James, servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ' (1:1a)" ("Controlling the Tongue and the Wallet: Discipleship in James," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 225).

[38] See Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 294–301.

negatively) of following Jesus. Compared with the Epistles, there are relatively few things that believers do in the Gospels to help others follow Christ. For this reason, much of the secondary literature about discipleship in the Gospels defines "discipleship" as following Jesus or becoming like him.[39] The lack of active discipling ministry in the Gospels on the part of the believers is due largely to the spotlight being on Jesus and his ministry. The active discipleship ministry by believers is concentrated in the beginning of the Gospels, the sending out of the 12 and 72, and the post-resurrection scenes. The functions of discipleship are carried out primarily by the Gospel writers, John the Baptist, the commissioned 12 and 72, Mary Magdalene, and Peter.[40]

Luke and John both describe their writing as forms of discipleship. Luke writes (γράφω: Luke 1:3) in order to instruct (κατηχέω) believers about Christ. Luke also references others who have passed down the message about Jesus as ministers of the word (ὑπηρέται τοῦ λόγου: Luke 1:2). And John writes (γράφω: John 20:31; 21:24) as a witness (21:24) so that the readers might believe (20:31).

Aside from Jesus in the Gospels, John the Baptist has the clearest role of helping others to follow Jesus. The focus of his ministry is verbal proclamation as well as the act of baptizing (βαπτίζω). It is rare in the Gospels that someone other than Jesus teaches, but in Luke 11:1 the disciples want Jesus to teach about prayer as John the Baptist had taught (διδάσκω) about prayer.[41] John's ministry can also be described as preaching the good news (εὐαγγελίζω: Luke 3:18), exhorting (παρακαλέω: Luke 3:18), bearing witness (μαρτυρέω: John 1:8, 32), speaking (λέγω: John 1:36), and proclaiming (κηρύσσω: Matt 3:1; Mark 1:4, 7; Luke 3:3). The disciples baptize (John

[39] For example, Jonathan Lunde begins his book, "'Follow me.' With these words, Jesus summarizes his call to discipleship" (*Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenantal Discipleship*, Biblical Theology for Life [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 25). Lunde develops the concept of discipleship further, but his starting point is to define discipleship in terms of following. See also Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, JSNTSupp 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986). Although not the main focus of his study, when Michael J. Wilkins uses "discipleship" it is in terms of following Jesus (*The Concept of Disciple in Matthew's Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Μαθητής*, NovTSupp LIX [Leiden: Brill, 1988]).

[40] There are some others who act in ways that help others follow Jesus. In Luke 2:38, Anna speaks about Jesus to those in the temple. The Samaritan woman speaks (λέγω: John 4:28). The formerly demon-possessed man proclaims (κηρύσσω: Luke 8:39).

[41] There are references to Pharisees, for example, teaching incorrectly. And there is the command to teach in the Great Commission.

4:2), and they also teach (διδάσκω: Mark 6:30; Mark 11:30). Jesus sends out the twelve to preach (κηρύσσω: Matt 10:7, 27; Mark 6:12; Luke 9:2) and to heal (ἰάομαι: Luke 9:2), and they in turn preach (εὐαγγελίζω: Luke 9:6) and heal (θεραπεύω: Luke 9:6). Similarly, Jesus sends out the 72 to heal (θεραπεύω: Luke 10:9) and speak (λέγω: Luke 10:5, 9).

Mary Magdalene has a discipleship function in reporting or announcing (ἀγγέλλω: John 20:18; ἀπαγγέλλω: Matt 28:8; Luke 24:9; εἶπον: Matt 28:7; Mark 16:7; λέγω: John 20:2) the message about Jesus to the disciples. Similar to Mary Magdalene's report, the two believers on the road to Emmaus then report (ἐξηγέομαι: Luke 24:35) to the others. In his post-resurrection appearance to Peter, Jesus instructs him to feed (βόσκω: John 21:15, 17) and shepherd (ποιμαίνω: John 21:16) his sheep. These terms are not defined at more length, but the pastoral terms are probably to be understood as a continuation of Jesus's ministry as the Good Shepherd. The Gospels focus on the activity of Jesus. While there is some verbal proclamation by others (particularly John the Baptist, the 12, and 72), their role is very much in the background.

Discipleship in Acts

In the absence of Jesus's earthly activity, Christians in Acts take an active role in discipleship. As noted above, the only occurrence of the term "to disciple" (μαθητεύω) occurs in Acts 14:21 and is connected with "preaching the gospel" (εὐαγγελίζω). Other terms become associated with how Christians help one another follow Jesus. Even as early as Acts 2, certain activities become characteristic of Christians: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). And the apostles' self-understanding of their role is to commit "to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). The most consistent discipleship activities are speaking, assembling for fellowship and the Lord's Supper, and serving one another.

In line with what Jesus did in the Gospels, Acts often describes Christians as teaching (διδάσκω, 12 times) or devoting themselves to the teaching (διδαχή, 3 times). The public proclamation of the word takes various forms, including to proclaim Jesus or the word (καταγγέλλω, 11 times); evangelizing or preaching the gospel (εὐαγγελίζω, 15 times), testifying (διαμαρτύρομαι, 9 times), and preaching (κηρύσσω, 8 times). The act of public speaking involves a number of verbs, each offering a slight nuance: "And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned (διαλέγομαι) with them from the Scriptures, explaining (διανοίγω) and proving (παρατίθεμαι) that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim

(καταγγέλλω) to you, is the Christ"' (Acts 17:2–3). Acts 28:23 also employs a variety of verbs to describe this public speaking ministry while also clarifying that this is public speaking of the Bible: "From morning till evening he expounded (ἐκτίθεμαι) to them, testifying (διαμαρτύρομαι) to the kingdom of God and trying to convince (πείθω) them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets."

Another characteristic of Christians helping one another follow Jesus is their commitment to meet together, and meeting together serves as another context for teaching (e.g., Acts 11:26). One characteristic of Christians gathering together is the activity of prayer (in the various cognates of εὔχομαι): "many were gathered together and were praying" (Acts 12:12; cf. Acts 1:14; 1:24; 4:31; 6:6; 13:3; 20:36; 21:5). Connected to prayer is also the sending out of Christians on mission: "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2–3). Finally, Christians are characterized by giving to and serving one another. In Acts 4:32–37, the believers willingly sell their possessions in order to care for one another. In Acts 6, believers are so concerned about caring for one another that they appoint a group to serve tables (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις; Acts 6:2) and care for the needs of the church. Their care for physical needs is described also as a support of the ministry of the word (Acts 6:3–4).

Discipleship in Paul

Much of the discussion in secondary literature regarding discipleship draws heavily from the Pauline Epistles, with some Epistles figuring more prominently into the discussion than others. The number of references to acts of discipleship is overwhelming, so we will categorize these ideas into a few key categories.

The most consistently recurring theme is the use of speech to help others faithfully follow Jesus. There are a number of verses in which several of these key concepts about the ministry of the word come together. In Col 1:28, Paul describes his manner and purpose in discipleship: "Him we proclaim (καταγγέλλω), warning (νουθετέω; which could be translated with the less-negative "instructing") everyone and teaching (διδάσκω) everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."[42] This verse illustrates the connection between these various concepts of the ministry of the word. This activity of proclaiming, instructing,

[42] This verse is often cited as a key verse about discipleship. Greg Ogden goes so far as to call it "Paul's version of the Great Commission in his personal mission statement" (*Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007], 20).

and teaching is how Paul understands his ministry of the word of God (Col 1:25). For Paul, the task of pastoral ministry is the ministry of the word of God in its various expressions with the goal of moving Christians into spiritual maturity: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching (διδασκαλία), for reproof (ἐλεγμός), for correction (ἐπανόρθωσις), and for training (παιδεία) in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). This ministry of the word involves both positive expressions of teaching and negative expressions of correction. Similarly, Paul commands Timothy to "preach (κηρύσσω) the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove (ἐλέγχω), rebuke (ἐπιτιμάω), and exhort (παρακαλέω), with complete patience and teaching (διδαχή)" (2 Tim 4:2). Each of these concepts recurs in the Pauline Epistles, but the most prominent are the tasks of preaching and teaching.

Faith in Christ comes through hearing, understanding, and learning the gospel, the word of truth (Col 1:5–9). To this end, Christians preach (κηρύσσω: Rom 10:14–15; cf. 1 Cor 1:23–24; 15:11; Col 1:23; 1 Tim 3:16) and proclaim the gospel (εὐαγγελίζω: Rom 10:15). Κηρύσσω, a word regularly used to describe the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels, recurs throughout the Pauline Epistles (about 20 times) to describe the task of Christian ministry. Εὐαγγελίζω, common in Acts to describe the apostolic work, has a similar frequency and semantic range to κηρύσσω in Paul, but εὐαγγελίζω tends to have the nuance of preaching in new areas. Connected with the idea of public proclamation is the ἀγγέλλω word group with its various prefixed forms. The word group of παραγγέλλω (12x) and its noun cognate παραγγελία (3x) refer to instructions or commands of Paul to other Christians, and it is a concept that is particularly concentrated in Paul's description of Timothy's ministry (1 Tim 1:3; 4:11; 5:7; 6:17). Διδάσκω and its various cognate words (e.g., διδακτικόν, διδασκαλία, διδάσκαλος, διδαχή) pervade the Pauline Epistles. The church is structured around this task of teaching as elders must be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24), and the pastoral task is a ministry of teaching (1 Tim 4:11, 13, 16; Titus 2:1). Correspondingly, the church must hold to faithful teaching (e.g., Rom 6:17) and reject false teaching. In Gal 6:6, Paul describes the church as those who are taught / instructed (κατηχέω) and commands them to financially support (κοινωνέω) those who instruct them (κατηχέω). Teaching is not limited to the pastoral office, as older women, for example, are to teach younger women (Titus 2:3; cf. 2 Tim

2:2) and the church, as a whole, is to teach one another (Col 3:16).

Another significant discipleship theme in Paul is the group of terms related to building up, edifying, and strengthening other believers. In three passages, Christians are called to use their spiritual gifts (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11, 28–31; Eph 4:16) for the common good (συμφέρω: 1 Cor 12:7) and building up the church (οἰκοδομέω: 1 Cor 14:4, 17; οἰκοδομή: 1 Cor 14:5, 12, 26; Eph 4:12; cf. Rom 15:2; 1 Thess 5:11). The giftings from the Spirit are diverse, but there is still a primacy given to (intelligible, contra tongues in 1 Cor 12–14) speech. In Eph 4, these gifts serve the purposes of equipping for ministry, edification, unity, maturity, and orthodoxy. The means of growing is by speaking the truth in a loving manner (ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ: Eph 4:15). The concept of building up and strengthening is connected to encouragement (e.g., Rom 1:11–12; 1 Thess 5:11, although different terms are used). Another way that Christians strengthen one another is by refreshing one another (ἀναπαύω: 1 Cor 16:18; 2 Cor 7:13; Phlm 7, 20), which includes a variety of actions of care.

Discipleship is not limited to speaking as it also involves the manner in which Christians interact with one another. Simply looking at the various "one another" commands in Paul's epistles provides a picture of the ways that Christians are to participate in helping others faithfully follow Jesus. Part of discipleship is a commitment to the various expressions of corporate worship. Again, this worship has the word as central: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16; cf. Eph 5:18–21). Christians are also characterized by praying for one another (e.g., Rom 1:10; 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:18; Phil 1:4; 4:6; 1 Tim 2:1, 8). Paul especially emphasizes the need for unity. This is such a pervasive emphasis in Paul's letters that the verbs and idioms are numerous. The recurring idiom of "having the same mind" communicates Paul's emphasis on unity: "complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil 2:2; cf. Rom 12:16; 15:5; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:2).[43] Connected to unity is the emphasis on promoting love and goodwill among the believers. There is the repeated call to love one another (e.g., Rom 13:8; 1 Cor 13; Gal 5:14; cf. Rom 12:10; Eph 5:1; 1 Thess 4:9).

Christians are called to holiness, and Christians have an active role in one another's holiness; that is, there is a corporate discipling aspect of growing in holiness. The church at Corinth is to mourn and be grieved over sin (1 Cor 5:2). They are to take an active role in removing (1 Cor

[43] See also the various expressions of unity in these verses: Rom 15:1, 6; 1 Cor 1:10; 11:33; 2 Cor 2:7; 13:11; Gal 2:9; Eph 4:1, 3, 29; 5:21; Col 2:2; 1 Thess 4:6; 5:12, 14.

5:2 [αἴρω], 5 [παραδίδωμι], 7 [ἐκκαθαίρω], 13 [ἐξαίρω]) the unrepentant sinner for the good of his soul (1 Cor 5:5; cf. 1 Thess 6:1) and the church's purity (1 Cor 5:7–8). Christians are to be examples for one another in their discipleship (e.g., 1 Cor 4:16; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6–7; 2:14; 2 Thess 3:7; 1 Tim 4:11; 2 Tim 1:13; Titus 2:7). They are to serve one another (cf. Rom 1:9; 7:6; 12:7; Gal 5:13; Phil 2:4; Philem 13). A number of verses, employing a variety of Greek verbs, command Christians to express hospitality and care (Rom 12:13; 14:1; 15:7; 16:2, 3; 1 Cor 16:10, 18; 2 Cor 7:2; Gal 4:14; Philem 17, 22), especially financial care for one another (e.g., Rom 12:8, 13; 15:25; 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1; Gal 2:10; 6:6; Eph 4:28; Phil 4:15; 1 Tim 5:3, 17; Titus 2:14). Christians also participate in discipleship by sending some on mission (e.g., Rom 10:15; 2 Cor 8:22; 2 Cor 9:3; Phil 2:19; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6). The important concept of κοινωνία (typically translated partnership or fellowship) can combine the aspects of financial care and sending on mission: "no church entered into partnership (κοινωνέω) with me in giving and receiving, except you only" (Phil 4:15; cf. Rom 12:13; 15:26; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; Gal 6:6; Phil 1:5). But κοινωνέω / κοινωνία is not limited to financial care as it can describe a deep spiritual bond (Rom 15:27; 1 Cor 10:16; 2 Cor 13:13; Phil 2:1).

Discipleship in the General Epistles

The General Epistles are an eclectic grouping of letters with a diversity of themes and emphases. One common feature is that they are less specific than the Pauline Epistles in stating the specific church to which they are written. Nevertheless, many of the themes present in the Pauline Epistles are also present in this smaller corpus. There is an emphasis on loving and caring for one another in the church. Peter exhorts his readers to love each other (ἀγαπάω: 1 Pet 1:22, 2:17, 4:8; 2 Pet 1:7; φιλαδελφία: 2 Pet 1:7). Similarly, there are commands for brotherly affection (φιλαδελφία: Heb 13:12; 2 Pet 1:7), affection for strangers (i.e., hospitality: φιλοξενία: Heb 13:2, 1 Pet 4:9), and greeting one another (ἀσπάζομαι: 1 Pet 5:13, 14). A related concept is the way in which believers are to express care for one another. They are to care for physical needs by looking after the vulnerable (ἐπισκοπέω: Jas 1:27), sharing with those in need (κοινωνία: Heb 13:16; κοινωνός: Heb 10:33), serving (διακονέω: 1 Pet 4:11), having compassion (συμπαθέω: Heb 10:34), and remembering those in need (μνημονεύω: Heb 13:3).

Another discipleship concept is the instructing and speaking role that believers have in one another's lives. Peter writes (γράφω: 1 Pet 5:12; 2 Pet 3:1) to give testimony (ἐπιμαρτυρέω: 1 Pet 5:12), exhort the readers (παρακαλέω: 1 Pet 5:1, 12), and stir them up (διεγείρω: 2 Pet 1:14; 3:1). The readers of Hebrews need someone to teach them (διδάσκω: Heb

5:12) and the readers of 1 Peter have had the gospel preached to them (εὐαγγελίζω: 1 Pet 1:25). God has gifted certain people to speak the sayings or oracles of God (λαλέω: 1 Pet 4:11). As an antidote to unbelief, believers are to exhort (παρακαλέω: Heb 3:13) one another so that they persevere in the faith. This idea of verbal exhortation to faith seems to be the idea in Jas 5:20 as well.

These epistles also give instruction about how believers are to relate to one another. Elders are to shepherd (ποιμαίνω: 1 Pet 5:2) and oversee (ἐπισκοπέω: 1 Pet 5:2). And those in the churches are to submit (ὑποτάσσω: 1 Pet 5:5) and obey (πείθομαι: Heb 13:7). Similarly, slaves are to submit to their masters (ὑποτάσσω: 1 Pet 2:18), wives are to submit to their husbands (ὑποτάσσω: 1 Pet 3:1). Those in the church are also to relate to one another in a way that they serve as examples of faith for one another (μιμέομαι: Heb 13:7; τύποι γινόμενοι: 1 Pet 5:3). They are to be committed to meeting together (Heb 10:25) and pursuing unity (εἰρήνην διώκετε: Heb 12:14; cf. 1 Pet 3:8). This meeting together serves to stir one another up (παροξυσμός: Heb 10:24) in their faith. These churches are also to be characterized by praying for one another in various forms. In Jas 5:14, the elders are to anoint (ἀλείφω) and pray for the sick (προσεύχομαι), and in Jas 5:16, believers are to confess (ἐξομολογέομαι) their sins and pray for one another (εὔχομαι).

Discipleship in Johannine Epistles and Revelation

In each of these works, John writes (γράφω: 1 John 1:4; 2:7; 5:13; 2 John 12; 3 John 13; Rev 1:11, 19) in order to help others follow Jesus. The Johannine Epistles emphasize the mutual love of believers as a way to help others grow in Christ (ἀγαπάω: 1 John 2:10; 3:11, 14, 23; 4:7, 11, 21; 2 John 5; ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν τὰς ψυχὰς θεῖναι: 1 John 3:16). There is also an emphasis on the role of Christians in speaking (ἀπαγγέλλω: 1 John 1:2, 3, 5; μαρτυρέω: 1 John 1:2; Rev 1:2) and listening (ἀκούω: 1 John 4:6). In 1 John, John describes the community as having fellowship (κοινωνία: 1 John 1:3, 7) and also mentions the importance of praying for one another (αἰτέω: 1 John 5:16). Christians should financially support fellow Christians (1 John 3:17–18) and ministers in their travels (προπέμπω: 3 John 6; ὑπολαμβάνω: 3 John 8). The Johannine Epistles describe the fellowship of believers in terms of believing the right things about Jesus and in turn loving one another. Because they are shorter in length, some of these themes are not as developed. In many respects, Revelation is a unique book in the Bible. Christians are presented as overcoming and enduring, but they do not have as active of a role in discipleship.

Summary of Concepts

The terms used to describe how Christians help other Christians follow Jesus are diverse and certainly extend beyond the lexeme μαθητεύω (trans. "to disciple" or "to make disciples"). This survey has demonstrated that there is no single category, much less a single term, under which these concepts are subsumed in the NT. And perhaps that is one of the reasons that the term "discipleship" has taken on the function of serving as an overarching concept for Christians helping Christians grow. For this concept of helping others to follow Jesus, we have used the term "discipleship" to encompass the variety of NT terms. The most pervasive "discipleship" concept is the variety of descriptions about speaking (preaching, teaching, rebuking, exhorting, etc.). "Discipleship" also emphasizes meeting together in unity and corporate worship, again with the emphasis on teaching. "Discipleship" involves care (honor, receive, greet, send, etc.) for one another and helping others live holy lives. The actions of "discipleship" most commonly are ministries of the word expressed in the local church. There are a number of other actions that might be rightly understood as "discipleship," but verbalizing God's word is primary.

What Are the Implications?

Similar to what Peterson observed with the term "sanctification" and Klink and Lockett observed with the term "biblical theology," we are concerned that "discipleship" "has become a catchphrase, a wax nose that can mean [almost] anything."[44] The first contribution of this article has been descriptive. We have described the confusing flexibility of how authors employ the term "discipleship" in secondary literature. These authors begin with a concept that they label "discipleship," and then they proceed to include various NT terms and texts under this concept without stating their criteria for inclusion. Given the most widespread usage of the term "discipleship"—helping others follow Jesus—we have described the breadth of terms that could be included in this concept in the NT. If we decide that "discipleship" is a helpful summary concept, then we must

[44] Edward W. Klink and Darian Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 13. David Peterson notes a similar problem with "sanctification": "History shows that when the terminology of sanctification is simply used to describe everything that happens to us after conversion, the definitive emphasis of the New Testament is soon obscured" (*Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, NSBT 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 137).

acknowledge that we have created a category that is not defined by particular NT lexemes. There is some sense in which Matthew 28:19 is using the verb "to disciple" as a summary term, as evidenced by the participial modifiers. But common usage of "discipleship" or "to disciple" has expanded well beyond what Jesus explicitly relates to μαθητεύω. We have also described how the conversation about "discipleship" can be shaped by authors relying more heavily on certain parts of the canon at the potential downplaying or exclusion of others (e.g., the Gospels vs. Pauline Epistles).

In addition to this descriptive task, we also suggest some prescriptive conclusions. Since we have demonstrated the lack of clarity in the use of "disciple," "discipleship," and "to disciple," it is incumbent upon us to offer a proposal for how the terms might be used more clearly. Our exhortation is to reserve the noun "disciple" to describe a person who follows and learns from another. This definition corresponds to the NT use of μαθητής, and in the NT, it is primarily used in the Gospels. We also encourage authors to distinguish between the verb "to disciple" (or "to make disciples") that corresponds to a NT word (μαθητεύω) and the noun "discipleship" that is a concept encompassing several NT words. That is, the English word "to disciple" should be governed by the NT use of μαθητεύω, and the English word "discipleship" should represent of group of words subsumed under that term. In its limited NT usage, the verb "to disciple" is focused on incorporating believers into the church (i.e., baptizing: Matt 28:19) and instructing them (i.e., teaching or preaching: Matt 28:20; Acts 14:21). If "to disciple" is reserved for this more narrow use, then the concept "discipleship" can include the larger number of ideas connected to helping someone grow in Christ. "Discipleship," thus, is an English-language creation that serves to summarize and incorporate a diverse group of words under a single heading. There is nothing wrong with the creation of a term or category so long as an author acknowledges that he has departed from the strict correspondence to biblical language and is summarizing multiple ideas under a single term. When this is done, it is likewise helpful to explain what terms are incorporated into the concept and why.

Connected to this call for conceptual clarity is a concern not to flatten the diversity of New Testament terms. As we have shown, "discipleship"-concepts in the NT most commonly involve caring ministries and speaking the word. We caution against abandoning the diversity of NT terms for word ministry (preaching, teaching, rebuking, exhorting, etc.), for example, in favor of the overarching and less-specific concept of "discipleship." This preference for the concept runs the risk of deadening the lively nuances of NT terms in preference for a concept.

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Pastoral Necessity of Homiletical Application

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Abstract: *This work combines Scripture's applicative emphasis and preaching's pastoral nature to answer the question, "What are the pastoral implications of homiletical application?" The first section, "Pew Observations," surveys the pastor through the congregation's lens to determine his impact on their obedience to the sermon's exhortations. This section includes two subcategories that promote textually faithful, grace-driven, and pastorally applied sermon applications. The second section, "Pulpit Observations," reverses the order by observing the audience through the preacher's lens to develop contextually localized applications. With the lens still intact, the pastor performs a self-examination to discover his biases and background to avoid imposing himself on the biblical text and his audience through the applications he provides.*

Key Words: *contextualization*, *ethos, exegesis*, *grace-driven application*, *pastoral application, sermon application*, *textual application*

Scripture repetitively insists that true understanding results in obedience. Moses commands Israel's priests and elders, "Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law" (Deut 31:12).[1] Jesus says to his disciples, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17). The theme continues in the apostolic age. Paul states, "For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified" (Rom 2:13).

Scripture's consistent emphasis on applying its truths supports sermon application's necessity. Late and contemporary preachers voice their approval of the previous claim through their statements on homiletical application. William Perkins says that preaching involves reading the text, explaining its meaning, gathering doctrines, and "if the preaching is suitably gifted, applying the doctrines thus explained to the life and practice

[1] All English Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV unless other noted.

of the congregation in straightforward, plain speech."[2] John Broadus claims that "application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion, or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done."[3] Bryan Chapell says that "without application, a preacher has no reason to preach because truth without actual or potential application fulfills no redemptive purpose. This means that at its heart, preaching is not merely the proclamation of truth, but truth applied."[4] Calvin Miller asserts that "diagnosis is analytical. Application is prescriptive. Without application, there is no sermon. Application is what gets the Sermon off the Mount, and down into the valley where the toilers live out their days."[5]

Preaching is also pastoral in nature. Samuel Volbeda argues that if preaching is pastoral, the sermon must have a pastoral quality and spirit.[6] Richard Caldwell claims that "preaching is a pastoral work. The man who faithfully preaches is the man who loves God and his church, and therefore watches for souls. He should have the mindset and aim of one who is called by God to shepherd the church through the careful teaching and application of the word of God."[7] He highlights how pastoral responsibilities outside preaching offer the congregation opportunities "for the reiteration and application of preaching."[8]

Therefore, if preaching is pastoral and application is an essential sermon component, what are the pastoral implications of sermon application? This work seeks to determine the pastoral necessity of arriving at accurate homiletical application. Does sermon application strengthen if the pastor is a model of his applicative statements? Can application become more effective when the preacher knows his congregation? This essay concludes that faithful contemporary application is pastorally applied and contextually localized for a specific audience.

The first section, "Pew Observations," focuses on the lens the congregation sees the pastor through and how their observations impact their

[2] William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 75.

[3] John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (Louisville, KY: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 197.

[4] Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 188.

[5] Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 79.

[6] Samuel Volbeda, *The Pastoral Genius of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 29.

[7] Richard Caldwell, *Pastoral Preaching: Expository Preaching for Pastoral Work* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer, 2016), 18.

[8] Caldwell, *Pastoral Preaching*, 26.

obedience to the sermon's application. "Pew Observations" includes two subcategories that argue for favorable outcomes when the congregation sees that the pastor develops textually faithful and pastorally applied applications. The second section, "Pulpit Observations," considers the lens a preacher must apply when developing contextually localized homiletical application. "Pulpit Observations" also consists of two subcategories discussing the homiletician's responsibility to exegete the audience and himself to arrive at contemporary applications.

Pew Observations

Aristotle was not a man of faith; however, he speaks extensively on persuasive rhetoric through his three modes of rhetorical persuasion. *Logos* and *ethos* are two of the three relevant modes for this work. He states in his first book on rhetoric (translated), "There is persuasion through character (*ethos*) whenever speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly. Persuasion occurs through the arguments when we show the truth (*logos*) or the apparent truth from whatever is persuasive in each case."[9]

Therefore, the homiletician's life and character of godliness (*ethos*) and faithfulness to preaching Scripture accurately (*logos*) play significant roles in persuasion when applying Aristotle's modes to the preaching ministry. The preacher can "persuade others" (2 Cor 5:11) not by "plausible words of wisdom" (1 Cor 2:4) but with the wisdom God reveals through his Spirit (1 Cor 2:10). This section discusses the lens that a congregation sees the preacher through and how their view positively or negatively impacts their response to the sermon's exhortations. Confidence in gospel truths, the Spirit-inspired word, and holy living result in God producing favorable outcomes in the attendees' hearts, which are spiritual formation and maturity.

Textually Faithful Sermon Application

Parishioners are confident that a pastor's sermon applications benefit their spiritual lives when they derive from the biblical text. Textual applications carry more authority and prevent congregants from questioning whether the preacher wishes to sway them toward his agenda through manipulative techniques and methods. Luke records the following words when Peter preaches to Cornelius and the Gentiles present at Caesarea, "While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who

[9] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2nd ed., trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 38–39.

heard the word" (Acts 10:44). A church that receives faithful exposition from their pastor week after week becomes confident that his contemporary exhortations are Spirit-empowered. This section highlights four principles to ensure sermon applications adhere to the Scriptures.

The first principle is to ensure that applications are biblical and textual. This work does not discuss the exegetical process necessary to determine a text's meaning; however, the expositor must know the divine and human author's intended meaning before proceeding with textual application. Daniel Akin explains that text-driven application should be "grounded in biblical truth through a historical-grammatical-literary-theological analysis of the biblical text," "based on the author's intended meaning," and should "demonstrate[s] the relevance and practical nature of biblical truth for listeners in their present life context," "include[s] practical illustrations, examples, and suggestions," and "persuade[s] and exhort[s] listeners to respond in obedient faith."[10] Akin's explanation includes several ways that application can express itself in the sermon (illustrations, examples, and suggestions) while remaining faithful to the text's authorial meaning.

Greg Heisler argues for the Spirit's involvement in textual applications by stating, "The purpose of the sermon should match the Spirit's purpose in the text. The goal of the sermon should match the Spirit's goal in the text. The change I (Heisler) call for in my sermon (application) should be the change the Spirit calls for in the text."[11] Some applications are biblical and beneficial, yet not textual to where the congregation can connect the sermon's application and the pericope the pastor preaches. Pace adds, "Advocating for prayer, spending more time in God's word, or a stronger commitment to the church are all helpful reminders our people need to hear. While these applications may be biblical, that does not mean they are textual."[12]

To summarize the first principle, Pace responds to an interview question, "What safeguards do you recommend so that preachers do not stray from the biblical text in their use of application?" by recommending three questions to ask to ensure that application remains textual. "'What is the theological truth of this text?' because the nature of revelation is revealing who 'God is.' The second question should be doctrinal, 'God does.' How

[10] Daniel L. Akin, "Applying a Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 272–74.

[11] Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 110.

[12] Robert Scott Pace, *Preaching by the Book: Developing and Delivering Text-Driven Sermons*, ed. Heath A. Thomas (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 51.

does it relate to God's people? The third layer is spiritual. 'God is …,' 'God does …,' therefore, 'We should.'"[13]

The second principle to ensure that sermon application adheres to the biblical text is that application must follow exposition. The following are examples of application's placement in the sermon throughout church history. Paul's letters, although not sermons, provide a model for the second principle. For example, the first three chapters of Ephesians provide indicatives and doctrinal instruction. In comparison, the final three chapters list imperatives, applications that correlate to the theological teaching from the letter's previous chapters. Thomas Carroll comments on John Chrysostom's sermon structure by stating, "For Chrysostom, preaching was essentially the interpretation of a text from Scripture and its application to a particular congregation. Exegesis is, therefore, the starting point of his preaching as exhortation is its conclusion."[14]

The Spirit transformed Geneva through John Calvin's preaching multiple times throughout the week.[15] The body of Calvin's typical sermon includes exposition with application to follow and exhortation to obedience for each major point or sermon division.[16] Richard Baxter says of application, "What a tragedy it is, then, to hear a minister expand doctrines and yet let them die in his people's hands for the lack of a relevant and living application."[17] Application appears throughout Baxter's sermon divisions, with a majority in the conclusion. Jonathan Edwards concludes his sermons with a lengthy section on application after expounding upon a specific doctrine at the sermon's onset.[18] John Broadus suggests, "The body of the discourse has furnished the intellect with instruction and argument; what we want in concluding is, as remarked above, something which appeals to the affections and the will."[19] He also recommends that "the conclusion will, for the most part, consist of application. This term, as we have already seen, is popularly used to embrace a variety of materials, including application proper, suggestions for practical guidance, and persuasive appeal."[20] Lastly, Timothy Keller speaks against following

[13] Robert Scott Pace, interviewed by author, February 24, 2022.

[14] Thomas K. Carroll, *Preaching the Word: Message of the Fathers of the Church* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984), 114.

[15] Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Some Pastors and Teachers: Reflecting a Biblical Vision of What Every Minister Is Called to Be* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), 17.

[16] T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 133–36.

[17] Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 69.

[18] Ralph G. Turnbull, *Jonathan Edwards the Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 168.

[19] Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 247.

[20] Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 245.

the Puritan sermon model too rigidly by explaining the text and doctrinal propositions and saving application for the end.[21] He recommends that general applications appear in every division, with specific applications arising as the sermon progresses.[22]

I agree with Keller by not promoting a rigid structure when developing sermon outlines. Akin, Allen, and Matthews properly define a text-driven sermon as "a sermon that develops a text by explaining, illustrating, and applying its meaning. Text-driven preaching stays true to the substance of the text, the structure of the text, and the spirit of the text."[23] Their definition prioritizes the text when developing exposition, formulating the sermon's structure, and even the spirit and tone that preachers express when delivering the sermon. Therefore, different texts call for various structures and application placement; however, as the second principle highlights, application must always follow exposition. The congregation trusts applications that originate from the biblical text.

This pattern parallels the exegetical process the homiletician follows during sermon development. Developing applications happens after exegeting the text. Pace comments on exegesis preceding application during sermon preparation, "We really have to guard ourselves from putting the cart before the horse. Even if we know where the path is going, we still have to walk down the path to ensure we don't high jack or detour where the text is leading us. Application should be done at the end of the exegetical process. This prevents subjective application and reading present day application into the passage."[24]

Daniel Doriani's stance stands in opposition to the previous statements. He argues, "We do not exclude all thoughts of relevance until we complete our exegesis. While we interpret Scripture, Scripture interprets us. We might say that the Scripture applies itself to us. Understanding and application are separable but overlapping."[25] Naturally, contemporary application may birth in the preacher's mind during the exegetical process; however, textually unfaithful applications appear when he fails to filter his applications once the interpretation process is complete. The congregation listening to the sermon is similar. They wish to see that a pastor's

[21] Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015), 183.

[22] Keller, *Preaching*, 183.

[23] Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews, eds., *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 8.

[24] Robert Scott Pace, interviewed by author, February 24, 2022.

[25] Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 22–26.

applications originate from the text's authorial meaning by following exposition.

The third principle for developing textually faithful application is that application must not exceed the amount of time spent reading and explaining the text. The preacher communicates Scripture's value by allowing the text and its explanation to eclipse the time spent in remaining sermon elements. Calculating the amount of exposition versus application can safeguard the preacher from overriding the biblical text. My previous research on Calvin and Edwards' sermons supports the principle and highlights how genre contributes to the amount of application to include. The research on Calvin observes four homilies from four separate biblical genres. Calvin's Decalogue and Job sermons contain forty to forty-five percent application versus exposition. The Beatitudes embody under fifty percent application, and his Ephesians homilies include thirty-five percent. Application appears more in his sermons on narrative texts versus epistles.

Ralph Turnbull records Edwards' sermon breakdown between exposition and application in several of his most famous homilies. "The Sovereignty of God" contains twelve pages of exposition, three pages of application; "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," four pages of exposition, nine pages of application; "The Excellency of Christ," thirteen pages of exposition, nine pages of application.[26] Edwards follows the Puritan approach to sermon structure by predominately saving application for the sermon's conclusion. There is no universal percentage of homiletical application's inclusion in the homily as long as it does not override textual exposition.

Finally, applications that are grace-driven increase a congregation's trust and prevents exhaustion or frustration. Jesus says of the scribes and Pharisees' demands, "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders" (Matt 23:4a). Chapell comments on Pharisaic applications by stating, "Make sure that you motivate believers primarily by grace, not by guilt or greed. If God has freed his people from the guilt of sin, then preachers have no right to put believers back under the weight Jesus bore or to reenslave them to any idolatry of selfishness."[27] Miller correctly states, "The world is tired of hearing pulpit 'how-tos' that have arrived to take the place of genuine transcendence."[28] Any application that does not derive from justification by grace alone through faith alone obscures the gospel message. Doriani says, "The first theme of application is that God's prior love calls forth faith, obedience, and

[26] Turnbull, *Jonathan Edwards the Preacher*, 168.

[27] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 198.

[28] Miller, *Preaching*, 29.

affection for the Father."[29] A congregation's obedience to a pastor's applicative statements originates from the previous statement. Faithful service to God stems from a love for him and a desire for his glory. Application is a response to God's character on full display through Christ in a particular passage of Scripture.[30]

A preaching method that ensures sermon applications are grace-driven instead of moralistic is Chapell's Fallen Condition Focus (FCF). He defines the FCF as "the mutual human condition that contemporary persons share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage of God's people to glorify and enjoy him."[31] Therefore, applications originating from the grace required to rescue a person from the fallen condition that the text reveals become grace-oriented and impossible to articulate without the Spirit's help. Chapell argues that when applications lose sight of the FCF, the sermon becomes a handful of legalisms to follow without a redemptive focus.[32] Miller highlights, "The congregation wants the pastor to be a person of information. No one who speaks all the time, as preachers do, can be right all the time, as preachers aren't. Still the people in the pew want us to be right, and not just about the Bible either."[33] Miller probably agrees with the addition, "but especially the Bible," at the end of his previous quote. A biblically literate audience expects the pastor to preach the truth accurately. They expect him to be a man of biblical and theological information. The audience quickly recognizes the homiletician who steps into the pulpit ill-equipped with content. He loses his listeners' trust and fails to leave a lasting mark that sways them toward obedience to his applications.

The Pastor's *Ethos* and Sermon Application

God says to Jeremiah, following Israel's misleading by self-serving leaders, "And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:15). Therefore, God's future shepherds that he promises to his covenant people are followers before they are leaders and understand that the people in their care are not their own.[34] Countless churches are guilty of prioritizing a pastor's gifted-

[29] Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 45.

[30] Pace, *Preaching by the Book*, 52.

[31] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 199.

[32] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 190.

[33] Miller, *Preaching*, 31.

[34] Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 22.

ness over his godliness and eventually suffer the consequences. This section presents four spiritual components of the preacher's life that connect his *ethos* with the audience's response to his sermon applications.

The preacher that lives a life yielded to the Holy Spirit will see favorable outcomes from his congregants. Congregants hear a pastor preach with his life prior to him stepping into the pulpit, impacting whether they heed his textual applications. Charles Spurgeon encourages his students to ensure that their character agrees in all respects with their ministry.[35] He says of preachers, "Our truest building must be performed with our hands; our characters must be more persuasive than our speech."[36]

Abraham Kuruvilla says rhetoric "is not simply the art of persuasion but the art of persuading for good, accomplished only by one who is morally good."[37] "Good" to God is conformity to Christ (Rom 8:28–29). Therefore, the preacher that remains yielded to the Holy Spirit consistently allows the Lord to minister to his soul so that he can minister to others. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix argue that good exposition and meaningful personal worship are not separate from one another.[38] They state, "Many otherwise gifted men miss the mark here. They assume their natural and spiritual giftedness will suffice. But even God's gifts, exercised in the energy of the flesh, breed death instead of life. How can we possibly communicate the reality of God to those who listen to us preach unless we've been in God's presence ourselves?"[39]

The second component is the preacher's dependence on God through prayer. Paul's reliance on prayer for the churches and companions he ministers to plays a significant role in their spiritual growth. He tells the church in Rome, "that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers" (Rom 1:9–10). He prays for the Ephesians' spiritual maturity in Ephesians 3:14–21. Paul's consistent and fervent prayers result in growth and maturity for those he instructs.

Paul also states in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God this is with me" (1 Cor 15:10). John Piper asks the question from this verse, "How do you preach so that the preaching is a demonstration of God's power and not your

[35] Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: The 28 Lectures, Complete and Unabridged—A Spiritual Classic of Christian Wisdom, Prayer and Preaching in the Ministry* (Pantianos Classics, 1875), 17.

[36] Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 17.

[37] Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 43.

[38] Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2017), 96.

[39] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 96–97.

own?"[40] The answer to this question is significant for this study because God's power in the preaching moment (or absence) is quite evident to the audience. His five-step response appears as the acronym APTAT. "I *admit* to the Lord that without him I can do nothing. Therefore, Father, I *pray* for help. The next step is *trust*, not merely in a general way in God's goodness, but in a specific promise where I can bank my hope for that hour. I *act* in the confidence that God will fulfill his word. I *thank* God at the end of the message that I was sustained and that the truth of his word and the purchase of his cross have been preached in some measure in the power of his Spirit."[41] His model provides a practical tool for pastors to seek God's grace in the preaching moment for soul transformation.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones refers to the Spirit's anointing as "unction" and emphasizes the significance of seeking, expecting, and yearning in prayer for his power and yielding to him when his power arrives.[42] He believes that the audience senses the effects of a Spirit-filled preacher through prayer and is more likely to apply his exhortations. He says, "They (listeners) are gripped, they become serious, they are convicted, they are moved, they are humbled. Some are convicted of sin, others are lifted up to the heavens, anything may happen to any one of them. As a result, they begin to delight in the things of God, and they want more and more teaching."[43] Prayer causes listeners to hear and visualize the Spirit's power working through the preacher's proclamation.

The third component is the homiletician's obedience to his applications. If a preacher exhorts, rebukes, corrects, or teaches his audience to follow specific applications yet the congregation does not see their shepherd as a model to follow, it weakens his persuasive appeal. For example, suppose the pastor begins an evangelism initiative from the pulpit due to a lack of salvations in the church but rarely shares his faith. In that case, it weakens the conviction and response from hearers.

Jesus's perfect discipleship model builds upon the third component. His disciples listen to his teaching and then observe his life accurately, reflecting his words as a paradigm to follow. He can say, "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (John 13:15). Kevin Vanhoozer's advice to the teacher reflects Jesus's example.

[40] John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 49.

[41] Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 49–51 (emphasis original).

[42] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 340.

[43] Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 340.

He says, "Imparting and receiving information is only part of what transpires in teaching and learning. The good teacher, of Christian doctrine or anything else, knows that one must not only state facts but also show how."[44] While the pastor will not display the perfect model that Jesus provides his disciples, he must strive for obedience to all the general and contemporary applications he presents to his flock.

The apostle Paul repeatedly encourages the churches and individuals he disciples to become imitators of him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 4:15–17; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:7–9; 2 Tim 3:10–11). He says to the Philippians, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us" (Phil 3:17). To Timothy, "You however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me" (2 Tim 3:10–11). Paul can provide a wide range of imperatives to his spiritual children that they can mimic from his words and life. Kuruvilla adds, "The Aristotelian *ethos* demands that preachers' lives also reflect their words. They should be models, to the best of their abilities and in the power of the Spirit, as they portray what it means to be faithfully obedient."[45] Homileticians who neglect to follow the same applications they pronounce are no different from scribes and Pharisees. A congregation with the same pastor consistently teaching and living amongst them will soon become conscious of his hypocrisy, negatively impacting their obedience to his exhortations.

The final component focuses on the homiletician's *ethos* in the preaching moment. A preacher's *ethos* describes the prior reputation that a preacher brings to the pulpit (extrinsic *ethos*) and an *ethos* created in his discourse (intrinsic *ethos*).[46] The previous section highlights how the Christian orator can earn his audience's trust by remaining faithful to the text's substance, structure, and spirit. This portion of the study focuses on how the homiletician reveals the text's spirit through rhetoric and ways to establish relationships with the congregation during the speaking engagement.

Communicating the text's spirit requires the preacher to align his emotion (*pathos*) with the passage's emotional expression. Hershael York states, "Through conveying emotion, we can denote urgency, joy, sorrow,

[44] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 44.

[45] Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching*, 44.

[46] James E. Beitler III, *Seasoned Speech: Rhetoric in the Life of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 31.

hope, grief, solemnity, faith, or any other appropriate emotion that further highlights the meaning of God's original message."[47] For example, Paul expresses the severity of incestual, sexual sin in the Corinthian church by stating, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you" (1 Cor 5:1–2). Paul's tone is harsh, expressing words of rebuke for the hideous sin the church is allowing to linger. The expositor has the right to imitate Paul's tone during his exposition, causing the audience to connect his tone with the biblical text instead of suspecting that the preacher is targeting them. However, preachers must assess their congregations before rebuking them for sinful actions they are not guilty of committing.

Dooley and Vines caution the preacher to avoid forcing the text to align with his emotional design. They state, "*Pathos* that does not correspond to the emotive mood of the biblical author is dangerously manipulative. Just as we are not free to tamper with the inspired *logos* of the Bible, neither are we at liberty to alter its *pathos*."[48] Comparing Scripture's *logos* and *pathos*, York argues, "I concur completely and argue further that a failure to preach the emotional content of the text is as much an abdication of expository responsibility as failure to preach the theological content."[49] I agree with York that expressing a passage's emotion is significant; however, I would not equate the emotional (*pathos*) content with the theological (*logos*) content. Akin's lecture to his seminary students appropriately responds to York's statement. He says, "What you say is more important than how you say it, but how you say it has never been more important."[50]

There is also a relational dimension to persuasive communication from the pulpit. It initially sounds strange that a one-way verbal conversation can create a relational tie; however, it happens during every speaking engagement whether the speaker and audience are aware or not. Daniel Berger references Billy Graham's ability to establish relational ties with

[47] Hershael York, "Communication Theory and Text-Driven Preaching," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 237.

[48] Adam B. Dooley and Jerry Vines, "Delivering a Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 247.

[49] York, "Communication Theory and Text-Driven Preaching," 241.

[50] Daniel Akin, Ph.D. Seminar in Expository Preaching, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 31, 2022.

his audience at the sermon's onset to enhance the evangelistic appeal, arguing that "persuasion is primarily relational."[51]

The relational aspect of persuasive Christian rhetoric originates from a relational God. Berger comments, "Without the spiritual dimension, communication would be coercive or informative but not persuasive. The still small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to the spirit can be exceptionally persuasive, yet never manipulative."[52] The preacher speaks with words clothed in the Spirit to build authentic Christian relationships from the pulpit to the pew.

Finally, Stephen Rummage suggests that every pastor ask these questions about his appearance that may impact the audience's perspective of his *ethos*. "Are you staying physically fit and watching your weight? Is your hair arranged in a pleasing way? Are you dressed appropriately for the occasion? Are you neat and orderly? Does your appearance distract or detract from your message?"[53] The pastor must consider all minor details that can deter an audience.

Conclusion

"Pew Observations" conclude that the church responds positively towards textually faithful applications delivered by a pastor who consistently displays a Christian *ethos*. This section highlights that homiletical application must originate from the passage expounded upon by remaining biblical and textual. Applications also follow textual exposition to ensure the audience makes the connection between the application and the biblical text. Exposition exceeds application in sermon time so that listeners notice their leader giving prominence to the Scriptures. Faithful applications remain grace-oriented to prevent exhaustion and insincerity. Lastly, the preacher is responsible for yielding to the Holy Spirit, depending on God through prayer, becoming the applications he preaches, and maintaining a Christian *ethos* inside and outside of the pulpit. A congregation that observes their shepherd express these pastoral necessities are more likely to imitate his life and words as he imitates the Lord.

Pulpit Observations

The focus now transitions from the audience's lens to the preacher's observations. What should a pastor consider when exegeting an audience

[51] Daniel Berger, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Christian Public Rhetoric* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 5.

[52] Berger, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, 8.

[53] Stephen Rummage, "The Preacher's Personal Life and Public Behavior," in *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 345–47.

for developing contemporary sermon applications? Collins dictionary definition of "contextualization" reads, "to place (a word, event, etc.) into a particular or appropriate context for the purpose of interpretation or analysis."[54] Homileticians and missiologists use "contextualization" to describe methods of preaching the gospel to specific cultural contexts.

Bruce Nicholls defines contextualization as "the translation of the unchanging content of the gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate cultures and within their particular existential situation."[55] Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost's definition reads, "the dynamic process whereby the constant message of the gospel interacts with specific, human situations. It involves an examination of the gospel in the light of the respondent's world view and then adapting the message, encoding it in such a way that it can become meaningful to the respondent."[56]

The first section, "Audience Exegesis," focuses on the significance of knowing and contextualizing an audience to develop contemporary textual applications. This section lists factors to consider when exegeting an audience that includes "guiderails" and "guardrails" to implement. The second section, "Self-Exegesis," requires the expositor to exegete himself to determine the presuppositions and biases that positively or negatively impact the applications he presents.

Audience Exegesis

Any information pastors can gather from their flock and the surrounding community improves the specific applications they use; however, preachers must apply certain precautions to prevent hermeneutically elevating the audience to a position they do not belong. Exegeting the audience requires the preacher to prioritize the Scriptures, live amongst the congregation, identify his flock's spiritual maturity, and understand generational differences to develop faithful contemporary applications for the expository sermon.

D. A. Carson divides the contemporary understanding of contextualization into two separate brands. The first brand "assigns control to the context; the operative term is praxis, which serves as a controlling grid to

[54] "Definitionof'Contextualize,'"https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/contextualize.

[55] Bruce J. Nicholls, "Theological Education and Evangelization," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), 647.

[56] Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 83.

determine the meaning of Scripture."[57] This brand allows readers from various cultural contexts to determine the text's meaning, leaving little to no significance to the original author's (divine and human) intent. Fred Craddock and Stanley Fish support Carson's first brand of contextualization. Craddock calls for a "program of biblical study and biblical preaching that is more realistic and more responsible as far as the bearing of the congregation's situation upon understanding the message of the text."[58] Fish argues, "It is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features."[59]

I support Carson's second brand of contextualization that "assigns the control to Scripture, but cherishes the 'contextualization' rubric because it reminds us that the Bible must be thought about, translated into, and preached in categories relevant to the particular cultural context."[60] Nicholls and Hirsch and Frost's definitions previously highlighted also support Carson's second brand.

The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 is an example of providing instructions from the text's unchanging principles to a specific audience. The apostles conclude that circumcision and works of the law are not requirements for salvation; however, James does suggest that Gentiles "abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20). These applications for the Gentiles are not prerequisites for salvation, nor are they universal, timeless applications (apart from sexual immorality). They are applications for the contemporary Gentile audience in the first-century church to avoid offending the Jews in their context.

Stott's conversation on conservative and liberal preachers concludes with these comments: "On the one hand, conservatives are biblical but not contemporary, while on the other liberals and radicals are contemporary but not biblical. Each side has a legitimate concern, the one to conserve God's revelation, the other to relate meaningfully to real people in the real world. Why can we not combine each other's concerns?"[61] This

[57] D. A. Carson, "Church and Mission: Reflections on Contextualization and the Third Horizon," in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1987), 220.

[58] Fred B Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, rev. ed. (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 101.

[59] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14.

[60] Carson, "Church and Mission," 220.

[61] John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 106–7.

work agrees with Stott's conclusion. The previous research provides guardrails to prevent elevating the audience above the biblical text. Once the guardrails are secure, the expositor can proceed to audience analysis by living amongst his flock.

Doriani discusses the factors that preachers consider when examining their people by stating, "Exegeting the congregation means knowing that its history, social strata, age, region, and ethnicity create unique traits and recognizing that the thought world of pastor and congregation may differ."[62] Matthew Kim adds six more areas through the acronym "BRIDGE," recommending knowing the audience's beliefs, rituals, idols within the cultural context, dreams for life, their view of God, and past experiences.[63] A preacher may ask, "Are you telling me that after spending all this time exegeting the text, I must also dissect these various areas in my listeners before the task is complete? Even if I decide to study my congregation, how do I address every member's context through specific applications?"

The answer to the first question is that a preacher that values ministry longevity does not have to restart audience exegesis every few years. MacArthur shares his father's advice before stepping into pastoral ministry, "First, the great preachers, the lasting preachers who left their mark on history, taught their people the word of God. Second, they stayed in one place for a long time."[64] The ministries of Calvin, Simeon, Edwards, Stott, Lloyd-Jones, Criswell, MacArthur, and others support MacArthur's father's advice.

Ramesh Richard offers helpful advice to the second question. He suggests using specific applications from the following five life arenas: personal life, home life, work life, church life, or community life.[65] Most people fall under one (if not several) of these five categories, captivating their attention to applying text-driven contemporary applications for transformational change.

Arriving at localized homiletical application requires work. The pastor must become a shepherd to his people before he can speak directly to their issues. Pace argues, "If you can preach the same sermon to any congregation, then I'm not sure you've gone far enough with application in

[62] Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work*, 38.

[63] Matthew Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 18–24.

[64] John MacArthur, "The Legacy of Long-Term Ministry," The Master's Seminary, https://blog.tms.edu/legacy-long-term-ministry.

[65] Ramesh P. Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 117.

your sermon."[66] The study now shifts to a crucial congregational element that a preacher must determine prior to sermon development.

Assessing an audience's overall spiritual maturity level is crucial during the sermon development and delivery process. Two questions will guide the discussion on preaching to an audience's spiritual state. First, is the audience predominantly lost or saved? Second, how mature are the regenerate in a predominantly Christian congregation? Before answering these questions, Dennis Johnson reminds homileticians that "what both the unbeliever and the believer need to hear in preaching is the gospel, with its implications for life lived in confident gratitude in response to amazing grace."[67] The gospel's value, sufficiency, and necessity in every sermon do not change as the audience changes, but knowing an audience's relationship with Christ assists in communicating the gospel's unchanging truths effectively.

Vines and Shaddix help answer the first question by stating, "Although many passages of Scripture address issues that are equally applicable to believers and unbelievers, most texts address either the people of God or unregenerate mankind. The preacher must be very clear in his mind regarding the primary audience of his particular text."[68] The primary audience that Vines and Shaddix highlight changes throughout seasons of the year and special services. For example, churches often experience an increased number of lost people attending Easter Sunday. The pastor should include a practical gospel message that avoids words only the educated can comprehend and a clear, brief invitation to follow.

Chapell presents five suggestions when preaching to a predominantly unsaved audience that captures the balance Helm recommends: "An evangelistic sermon should be biblical…. An evangelistic sermon should be positive…. An evangelistic sermon should be clear…. An evangelistic sermon should be relatively brief…. An evangelistic sermon should communicate urgency."[69] These elements avoid abandoning gospel truths while displaying an attitude of love and concern for lost souls.

Rummage acknowledges the second question by highlighting, "There are believers who are obeying God while others are living far from him. Some are stagnating in their spiritual lives, while others are growing. The application you make in the message and the way you present the truths of Scripture should be, to some extent, determined by the spiritual status

[66] Robert Scott Pace, interviewed by author, February 24, 2022.

[67] Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 55.

[68] Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 128.

[69] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 369–71.

and maturity of those who listen to your sermon."[70] Tony Merida suggests assuming biblical illiteracy from congregants. His suggestion does not mean the expositor cannot discuss the more profound matters of the biblical text. Merida explains, "Tell them how to find a passage of Scripture. Explain the stories as if you were teaching to someone who lived on foreign soil and had no Bible."[71]

Keller adds to the conversation by stating, "Avoid evangelical subcultural jargon and terms that are unnecessarily archaic, sentimental, or not readily understandable to the outsider." He adds, "You should give listeners theological definitions in their own language."[72] Spurgeon further takes what the Puritans called "plain-style preaching" by commenting, "We ought not to make even children inattentive. 'Make them inattentive,' say you, 'who does that?' I say that most preachers do; and when children are not quiet in a meeting it is often as much our fault as theirs. Can you not put in a little story or parable on purpose for the little ones?"[73] The focus now turns towards these "little ones" and other age groups to show how generational differences impact contemporary sermon applications.

To say that the current American culture is drastically divergent from previous generations is an understatement. Alan Noble acknowledges, "Whereas people traditionally kept the beliefs of their parents and community, today it is normal and even expected for each contemporary individual in the West to choose their own, personal beliefs. And it is common for people to change beliefs multiple times over their lives."[74] Thomas Bergler suggests that today's adolescents are searching for a faith that adapts to their social world versus their social world adapting to their faith.[75] Unfortunately, the American church often caters to their desire versus teaching otherwise. Bergler comments in a later work,

> American Christianity looks a lot like we would expect it to look if many Americans were stuck in a Christianized version of adolescent narcissism. It could be that most American churches have been fighting a heroic but failing battle against these trends toward a self-focused, immature faith. But the fact that so few American

[70] Stephen Rummage, "Preaching to the People in Front of You," in *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 327.

[71] Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Expositor: A Field Guide for Word-Driven Disciple Makers* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 239.

[72] Keller, *Preaching*, 104–5.

[73] Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 100.

[74] Alan Noble, *Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 37.

[75] Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 13.

> churchgoers know much about spiritual maturity and so few pastors have a plan to foster it suggests otherwise.[76]

Pastors must prioritize spiritual maturity in their churches from the pulpit through expositional preaching and allow it to flow to remaining ministries in the local body.

Jean Twenge provides a plethora of statistical data on what she terms the "iGen" or "internet generation." Twenge notes that the internet began two decades before the internet generation, though "iGen" represents adolescents with the internet constantly at their fingertips. She highlights how data on previous generations show increases in sex before marriage, alcohol consumption, teen pregnancy, driving under the influence, lack of parental supervision, and other categories; however, the internet generation is experiencing declines in these areas.[77] Today's teenagers are decreasing where previous generations increase and vice versa. High schoolers now wait longer to have sex, get their driver's license, go on a date, leave home, and find an occupation. Twenge credits the rapid change to an answer she calls obvious, smartphones.[78]

These changes now contribute to the rise in teen suicide, anxiety and depression, insecurity issues, and other areas that preachers can do more than talk negatively towards.[79] Expositors will serve young people well by including these issues with compassion and sincerity in their contemporary textual applications. Noble comments, "We need to be attuned to how our neighbors conceive of meaning and justification, what visions of fullness move them, and where they have found particular visions wanting. The desire to live a life of meaning and to have our being in the world justified is natural and good, but our goal is not to offer them just another vision of fullness to add to their options."[80] Noble's challenge requires trusting the Spirit's work through teaching gospel truths as closely to their circumstances as possible through sound biblical and audience exegesis.

Preachers cannot ignore their congregation's generational differences that influence their homiletical application. Despite these differences, they

[76] Thomas E. Bergler, *From Here to Maturity: Overcoming the Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 25.

[77] Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy–and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Atria, 2017), 17–47.

[78] Twenge, *iGen*, 17–47.

[79] Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (New York: Penguin, 2019), 148–51.

[80] Noble, *Disruptive Witness*, 81.

also must recognize what never changes about their messages. P. T. Forsyth says, "The only preaching which is up to date for every time is preaching this eternity, which is opened to us in the Bible alone, the eternal of holy love, grace and redemption, the eternal and immutable morality of saving grace for our indelible sin."[81]

There is no shortage of hermeneutical and homiletical works that teach and exhort exegeting the biblical text, which is praiseworthy. The books on audience analysis are thin in the preacher's library. This section discusses how sermon application preparation can begin once textual and audience exegesis ends to ensure that applications remain textually faithful and contextually localized to a specific audience. The following section explains how work is still left to accomplish before contextualization is complete.

Self-Exegesis

This section continues to see through the preacher's lens; however, his focus is not on the parishioners but himself. MacArthur comments, "Most of us will admit that we tend to be so self-oriented that we see many things first of all, and sometimes only, in relation to ourselves."[82] Contextualization requires the preacher to perform a self-examination of his biases and cultural and religious background to ensure that he does not impose himself on the biblical text and his audience through the applications he provides. Scott Gibson and Matthew Kim discuss the inescapability of our makeup by saying, "Lenses are inevitable and shaped by our gender, race, ethnicity, culture, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, experiences, denominational affiliation, seminary training or lack thereof, and so on."[83] The following paragraphs speak briefly to several elements Gibson and Kim list (along with others) to assist homileticians in self-analysis.

The first topic contributing to the preacher's makeup is his family background. A person cannot avoid inheriting the traits of their parents or guardians. Wayne McDill says, "You are like your mother or your father. Sometimes it is a strange experience to stand a certain way or gesture with your hand and see your father in it. Your temperament has come

[81] P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 20–21.

[82] John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1986), 118.

[83] Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim, eds., *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 157–58.

from a long line of forebears."[84] Analyzing family backgrounds requires studying the past familial environment, preacher's birth order, beliefs and values, time spent with one another, the health of parents' relationship, and multiple other factors.

A preacher also inadvertently carries his family dysfunction into his ministry. Familial issues such as parents separating, verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, hearing and visualizing racism towards others, treatment of the opposite sex, and other issues travel with the pastor as he steps into the pulpit; however, these experiences do not have to remain a hindrance. For the Christian, "all things work together for good" (Rom 8:28). McDill later highlights this truth through a conversation on exegeting past experiences.

The preacher's previous church experience also affects his preaching in multiple ways. These variations exhibit themselves through homiletical authors from different denominational backgrounds. A pastor's preaching philosophy, theology, methodology, and delivery often (not always) stem from their denominational affiliation. McDill says,

> If you grow up in a dynamic, growing church, you will likely have a more dynamic concept of worship and preaching. If your home church was characterized by a peculiar folk style or regional tradition, you will think of preaching in terms that fit that approach. Students from the mountains of North Carolina tell of the "hackers" from their region who preach in a unique style. Black students often come from churches where the preaching follows a traditional style that may not work well outside those circles.[85]

The opposite can also occur. Some preachers may reflect on negative experiences from the pulpit ministries of previous church affiliations and wish to abandon their upbringing. Regardless, certain aspects of previous church experience are inescapable whether the pastor is conscious of what remains engraved.

Preachers often neglect to address women with specific applications.[86]

[84] Wayne McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 1999), 29.

[85] McDill, *The Moment of Truth*, 30–31.

[86] This study supports the complementarian roles of males and females in the home, church, and society. Therefore, self-exegeting the preacher's gender assumes that the preacher is a male; however, this portion revolves around the preacher's view towards the opposite gender. This work is not a conversation that attempts to convert anyone toward a specific theological viewpoint. It is a challenge for the preacher to exegete himself and his thoughts surrounding the opposite sex.

Haddon Robinson reports from his context what remains applicable today, "In virtually every congregation, sixty percent or more of regular attendees are women, but many male preachers seldom refer to them or use illustrations or applications specifically related to their experiences."[87] Sam Andreades recalls a woman's response to his sermon on gender roles. She told him after the service, "I have heard plenty of times what I cannot do. Okay. Even if I accept that, it doesn't move me an inch toward knowing what I should be doing."[88] Andreades shamefully responds, "I saw my failure, and the church's failure in general, to give Rachel what she really needed. I was not giving her a reason to rejoice in the commands the Bible gives her."[89] Daniel Overdorf suggests that ladies often connect best "with preachers who speak relationally, in a conversational manner, and with a warm tone and body language. They appreciate speakers who let their guards down, laugh at themselves, and share their own stories."[90] Addressing women does not require the preacher to address every issue women have, especially not pretending to understand them all. The preacher must acknowledge that a large portion of his audience is the opposite gender and part of God's flock that he must shepherd well.

Race and ethnic divides appear throughout the Bible and across epochs of church history to the present day. This study supports Kenneth Matthews and M. Sydney Park's acknowledgment of the differences in the terms "race" and "ethnicity." They explain, "'Race' refers to inherited physical traits that characterize peoples, such as facial features and skin color. On the other hand, the term 'ethnic' (Greek, *ethnos*) identifies an affiliated 'people group' who share history, traditions, and culture, such as familial descent, language, and religious and social customs."[91] The preacher must ask, "Because I am '(a specific race and ethnicity),' how does that shape my preaching theology, methodology, and delivery? Do I favor a specific area of applications and illustrations over others due to my biases that originate from my race and ethnic background?"

Paul shares this issue with multiple churches he writes to that contain a blend of Jewish and Gentile believers. Clinton Arnold highlights the ethnic issues in the Ephesian church by arguing, "The problem may have

[87] Haddon Robinson, "Foreword," in *Preaching That Speaks to Women*, Alice P. Mathews (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

[88] Sam A. Andreades, *enGendered: God's Gift of Gender Difference in Relationship* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2015), 12–13.

[89] Andreades, *enGendered*, 12–13.

[90] Daniel Overdorf, *One Year to Better Preaching: 52 Exercises to Hone Your Skills* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 132.

[91] Kenneth A. Matthews and M. Sydney Park, *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 30.

been exacerbated by a large influx of Gentile believers into the community in the years since Paul ministered in Ephesus. Not only was there already a natural and cultural tension between Jews and Gentiles, but Gentile converts often lacked an appreciation for the Jewish heritage of their new faith."[92] Christian leaders must understand their congregation's potential racial divides and whether their biases are contributing to the divide to address the issue as Paul does.

Past life experiences also shape our direction when approaching textual applications for sermons. For example, someone with a history of marital challenges and negative experiences from their parents' marital issues may insert more applications and illustrations towards marriage in their sermons compared to the single pastor or the pastor without the same hardships. These experiences contribute significantly to a preacher's development and sermon content.

Derek Prime and Alistair Begg agree that life experiences enhance effective preaching. They believe that God allows preachers to pass through difficult experiences that cause them to question his purpose; however, these experiences allow pastors to serve others more faithfully.[93] They mention, "Our application of God's word will be unconsciously and helpfully colored by our assimilation of their experiences and cries for direction."[94] Prime even argues, "One reason I would discourage a young man from training for the ministry straight from school or university is that he probably does not have the experience of life that will be so important in relating his ministry of God's word to men and women's real-life situations."[95]

Cultural backgrounds also impact the sermon application preachers produce. Kim encourages pastors to ask what types of "food, clothing, language, music, celebrations, and view of time" they "eat, wear, speak, hear, celebrate, and hold?"[96] These answers naturally appear in the homiletician's specific applications in various ways; however, it is unbeneficial to mention applications that overlap in the areas favorable to him while ignoring the audience's cultural backgrounds. The applications from the Jerusalem Council mentioned earlier are examples of specific applications revolving around food that may apply to one audience but not another.

Whether the expositor went to seminary and where also impacts his

[92] Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 44.

[93] Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2004), 122–23.

[94] Prime and Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 123.

[95] Prime and Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 122.

[96] Kim, *Preaching With Cultural Intelligence*, 223.

sermons and applications. Raymond Bakke says, "Most of us went to Bible schools or seminaries where we learned to design ministry in our own image, i.e., to sing the songs we appreciate, and to preach sermons we would like to listen to. Unfortunately for us, the challenge now is to retool and design ministry strategies in the image of the unreached who may be very different from us culturally."[97] Bakke does not highlight Scripture's involvement in ministry strategies in this quote. However, he does reveal the pride that multiple preachers develop and implement in local churches after completing their seminary training. Every context in which a preacher ministers requires audience exegesis regardless of where a pastor completes his seminary training. Keller comments, "The moment you open your mouth, many things, your cadence, accent, vocabulary, illustrations and ways of reasoning, and the way you express emotions make you culturally more accessible to some people and force others to stretch and work harder to understand or even pay attention to you."[98] The expositor should not attempt to change the message or himself after self-examination; however, he must test whether he can make minor changes to his preaching content and delivery that will result in major changes to his audience's response.

Conclusion

First Corinthians 9:19–23 must become the heart of every pastor that seeks to reach his audience with the gospel by the Spirit's power without compromising biblical truths. "Pulpit Observations" determine that audience analysis grants ultimate control to the Scriptures and does not allow an audience to dictate textual meaning. The preacher must also be a man that loves, knows, and spends time with his flock by living amongst them. It is not good when the church sees its minister as supernatural and set apart from their lives.

Knowing an audience's spiritual maturity is crucial when preparing and delivering a sermon. This study supports Tony Merida's suggestion by assuming biblical illiteracy and making extra explanatory steps to ensure the audience comprehends the content. Generational differences also play a significant role when developing contemporary applications to ensure applications are specific to those attending while remaining textually faithful.

"Pulpit Observations" are not complete until the pastor directs the

[97] Raymond J. Bakke, "The Challenge of World Urbanization to Mission Thinking and Strategy: Perspectives on Demographic Realities," *Urban Mission* 4.1 (September 1986): 15.

[98] Keller, *Preaching*, 102.

attention to himself at some point during the exegetical process. Pastoral self-exegesis includes determining elements from the pastor's family background, previous church experience and denominational influences, thought process surrounding gender roles in the church, home, and society, racial and ethnic considerations, life experiences, seminary experience, and aspects of the preacher's cultural background. There is wisdom in implementing a strategic plan for the pastor to routinely perform a self-observation to protect him from declaring his cultural influences and biases as universally acceptable and correct.

Final Thoughts

The previous content explores the pastoral implications of sermon application to arrive at faithful homiletical application for the contemporary audience. The research supports the working thesis from the introduction. Faithful contemporary application is pastorally applied and contextually localized for a specific audience. Pastorally applied and contextually localized application requires the expositor to exegete the Scriptures, his audience, and their context, and systematically perform a self-observation to prevent from becoming the pastor that says, "Imitate me as I imitate me." The preacher must become a model of the specific applications he preaches while living amongst his flock to increase the application's effectiveness in their lives.

The following closing quote seems fitting to conclude this conversation. Alexander Maclaren comments on Jesus isolating the blind man before healing him, "Is there not in it a lesson for all you good-hearted Christian men and women, in all your work? If you want to do anything for your afflicted brethren, there is only one way to do it, to come down to their level and get hold of their hands, and then there is some chance of doing them good. We must be content to take the hands of beggars if we are to make the blind see."[99] Maclaren's quote supports the pastoral necessity of trusted homiletical application.

[99] Alexander Maclaren, *Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 5, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 322.

STR 14.1 (Spring 2023): 93–117

A Survey of 175 Years of Southern Baptist Resolutions

Bill Konyk

Abstract: *This essay is a survey of the resolutions adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention at its yearly meetings from 1845 through 2020. Analysis was aided by identifying topics using the machine learning algorithm Non-negative Matrix Factorization. General trends, shifts in language, and other interesting features are presented. Overarching themes are identified and supported using numerical data and statements from the Southern Baptist Convention, demonstrating several significant shifts in the functioning and focus of the organization. This includes a transition from focusing on missions to engaging with culture, a functional move to a representative form of governance, and prioritizing unity in belief over functional cooperation in missions.*

Key Words: *convention, culture, entities, history, missions, polity, resolution, resurgence, SBC, technology*

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is by far the largest protestant, Christian organization in the United States today. While it is technically a voluntary association of churches, the influence of what is effectively a denomination is widespread. Its all-time maximum size included 16.3 million members in 2006,[1] which corresponds to roughly five percent of the US adult population.[2] The SBC is one of the oldest Christian entities in America, reaching 175 years of age in 2020. Because of its size and longevity, it carries significant weight in Evangelical culture, theology, and public engagement.

The SBC also has one other particular defining trait: when gathered together, its members tend to be opinionated. Since its inception the organization has adopted resolutions at each yearly convention. While the purpose of these resolutions has changed over time, they remain a witness of how an influential group of Christians believed they ought to address issues in the church and society. Given that political views are strongly

[1] Kate Shellnutt, "Southern Baptists Drop 1.1 Million Members in Three Years" (Christianity Today, 12 May 2022), https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/may/southern-baptist-membership-decline-covid-pandemic-baptisms.html.

[2] Dalia Fahmy, "7 Facts About Southern Baptists" (Pew Research Center, 2019), https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/07/7-facts-about-southern-baptists/.

correlated with worship choices in America,[3] the history of the SBC's public witness is particularly relevant.

In this work, a machine-augmented analysis of the SBC's resolutions will be presented, using data science techniques to identify topics and track their prevalence through time. Due to the nature of the algorithm employed, this work will identify broad shifts in the language of the resolutions, connecting them to statements and motivations given by SBC messengers at the convention's yearly meetings. What will be seen are several large-scale changes in the organization over its history, including a shift in focus from missions to cultural engagement, moving from a direct form of governance to a representative one, and basing unity in belief rather than cooperation in missions.

Background

The SBC was formed in 1845 for "the propagation of the Gospel." This missionary society was constituted as a loose association of churches, with the business of the organization being decided by messengers from said churches at a yearly convention.[4] It is when gathered at such meetings that resolutions are proposed, debated, and ultimately adopted. They have encouraged action in churches, commissioned committees, directed the work of the convention, engaged with political leaders, and stated the SBC's view on particular issues.

Resolutions stand out among all the reports and documents produced by the SBC because they are by nature intended for public dissemination and their adoption requires consensus. While resolutions are fundamentally non-binding, and the SBC itself holds no formal authority over the faith and practice of cooperating churches, they are heavily influenced by the priorities and posture of messengers present. Thus, by analyzing the content of resolutions, one can reasonably infer what topics many

[3] Bob Smietana, "Many Churchgoers Want to Worship with People Who Share Their Politics" (Lifeway Research, 23 August 2018), https://research.lifeway.com/2018/08/23/many-churchgoers-want-to-worship-with-people-who-share-their-politics/; "Religious Landscape Study" (Pew Research Center, 2014), https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/religious-family/baptist-family-evangelical-trad/#social-and-political-views.

[4] *Annual of the 1845 Southern Baptist Convention* (Augusta, GA), 3. Note that the titles of the SBC Annuals have varied in style over the past 175 years. For consistency's sake, the modern title format will be used when referencing the proceedings from a particular SBC gathering, with the location of the convention being referenced in parentheses.

(though not all) of the local churches cooperating with the SBC have considered to be significant at various points in history. This provides a means of tracking the focus and priorities of the SBC through the decades.

The set of resolutions analyzed was built from the proceedings of the SBC's yearly gatherings, obtained from the Southern Baptist Historical Library[5] and the formatted resolutions hosted on the official SBC website.[6] While it would have been much simpler to use only the documents found on the SBC's website—as it is fairly straightforward to use web scraping tools to pull the data automatically—it turns out that a large number of resolutions adopted before 1930 are absent. This may be due to the fact that the process of adopting these statements has changed considerably throughout the SBC's history.

As of 2023, for a resolution to be considered for adoption it must be submitted to the Committee on Resolutions at least 15 days prior to the yearly meeting. If the committee believes it should be adopted, it is put to the convention as a whole and published in a specific section of that year's proceedings.[7] This process, however, is relatively recent. The committee was created in 1921, when the Committee on Arrangements proposed

> That a "Committee on Resolutions" be appointed by the "Committee on Committees" at the earliest moment in the session of the Convention…. to it shall be referred for consideration all resolutions except those offered by the Boards, and by the other committees of the Convention….[8]

Based on the proceedings, it appears that the Committee on Resolutions was not heavily used by the SBC until about 1950. Prior to this many resolutions were proposed, debated, and adopted on the floor of the convention. Others were accepted as a part of yearly reports written by the SBC's various committees. Additionally, in the early years of the SBC the resolution was often used for purely procedural matters such as adjourning for the day.

The evolving use of the resolution creates a certain amount of ambiguity regarding which ones should be compared. Any resolutions addressing mundane matters at the convention (such as motions to adjourn), procedural matters relating to existing committees, and yearly resolutions

[5] "SBC Annuals" (Southern Baptist Historical Library; Archives, 2022), http://www.sbhla.org/sbc_annuals/index.asp.

[6] "Resources in Resolutions" (Southern Baptist Convention, 2022), https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/.

[7] *Annual of the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention* (Anaheim, CA), 20.

[8] *Annual of the 1921 Southern Baptist Convention* (Chattanooga, TN), 37.

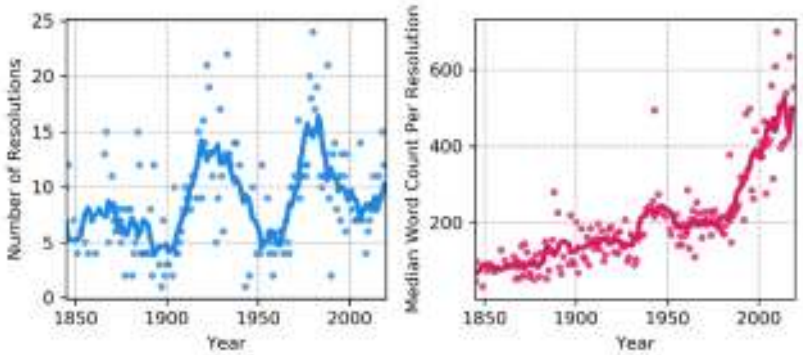

Figure 1: Left: The total number of resolutions adopted by the SBC per year. Right: The median word count per resolution by year. The dots represent raw values whereas the solid line represents a ten-year moving average.

thanking the host city or church were manually filtered out as they provide little insight into the SBC's position on any issue. Thus, while the SBC has adopted some 1669 resolutions between 1845 and 2020, only 1374 were used in this analysis.

Through the years the number of resolutions has varied considerably, reaching as high as 24 (1980) and as low as one (1987, 1943). Fig. 1 provides the total number of resolutions passed by year along with a ten-year moving average.[9] Looking at the trend, there are three distinct peaks around 1870, 1930, and 1980, separated by 50 and 60 years respectively. Interestingly, the number of resolutions has been increasing in recent years; if this trend continues, one would expect another flurry of resolutions around 2035.

While the number of resolutions has fluctuated significantly through the decades, it is very clear from Fig. 1 that the length of resolutions has increased consistently and, in recent years, substantially. In the 1800s resolutions tended to be very short, focusing on a particular topic or issue at hand and often omitting any sort of preamble that would provide context for the statement. Until 1985, the average length of the resolution increased at a relatively consistent pace. After that, resolutions became significantly more verbose, possibly beginning to level out around 2005.

[9] All plots will display a ten-year moving average rather than raw data. While this obscures the details of when individual resolutions were adopted, it is much more capable of identifying underlying trends and also accounts for the reality that most resolutions are the product of years of discussion or are adopted in response to long-term issues.

Methodology

In order to analyze the evolution of the SBC's resolutions data science techniques were applied to isolate topics within the texts. The specific machine-learning algorithm chosen was Non-negative Matrix Factorization (NMF), implemented and validated following research by Derek Greene.[10] Conceptually, the topic identification process involved converting each document into a list of words and weights. Next, mathematics were utilized to identify new lists of words that best describe all the documents. These new lists are referred to as topics because they consist of words tending to appear together.[11]

As an example, consider the top 50 words for one of the topics identified by NMF:

> Abortion, Life, Human Life, Mother, Fetal, Sanctity Human, Unborn, Legislation, Far, Abortion Demand, Southern Baptist, Decision, View, Medical, Deal, Affirm, President Clinton, Practice, Prolife, Moral, Historically, Society, Tissue, State, Roe Wade, Biblical, Congress, Adopt, Attitude, Include, Pregnancy, Plan Parenthood, Policy, Supreme Court, Nontherapeutic, Health, Save, President, Selfish, Prohibit, Problem, Sanctity, Protect, Use, United State, Sacredness, Andor, Reaffirm, Federal, Birth Control

Clearly, this captures words most often associated with the SBC's treatment of abortion. If a resolution contains a significant number of words from this list, it is very unlikely that it would be referring to the SBC's boycott of Disney.[12] By comparing the words in the resolutions to the words in the topics one is then able to assign topics to each resolution.

The difficulty in using NMF is that it is an 'unsupervised' machine learning algorithm, meaning there is no known "truth." As a result, while NMF is excellent at identifying latent patterns in the documents, such as in the example above, it is unable to distinguish whether the patterns themselves are meaningful. Because of this, some numerical validation steps were employed to ensure that the topics identified were sound from

[10] Mark Belford, Brian Mac Namee, and Derek Greene, "Stability of Topic Modeling via Matrix Factorization," *Expert Systems with Applications* 91 (2018): 158–59; Derek Greene and James P. Cross, "Exploring the Political Agenda of the European Parliament Using a Dynamic Topic Modeling Approach," *Political Analysis* 25 (2017): 77–94.

[11] A detailed description of the specific implementation is available upon request.

[12] *Annual of the 1997 Southern Baptist Convention* (Dallas, TX), 91–92.

a statistical perspective.[13] More importantly, the output was manually validated by comparing the top words in each topic with the documents that most heavily fit each topic.

This approach has two main advantages over a more traditional one. First, it can efficiently handle a large number of documents, comparing all resolutions simultaneously to each other. Second, the topics produced are arguably free from external bias, as the only source of information is the raw text of the resolutions themselves. Note that this claim only applies to the list of words produced by the algorithm; the moment a human assigns meaning or intent to the topic the potential for bias is reintroduced. Thus, this study is effectively machine-augmented; while the topics themselves and the trends were generated using a computer, the final analysis and interpretation still relies heavily on old-fashioned scholarly intuition.

Results

The primary result of this study is presented in Fig. 2, where one can see all the topics identified by NMF. The colored bars detail the percent of resolutions that fit each topic for a given year. This metric captures when a particular topic is most often observed and is largely insensitive to variations in the number or length of resolutions which, as seen in Fig. 1, can be significant.

Topic titles were assigned by identifying a common theme or concept among the topic's top words and resolutions most closely fitting the topic. If there is a '/' in the title it refers to two related, but separate concepts. For example, the topic *Prohibition / Moral Concern* primarily appears in resolutions related to the prohibition movement in America. Because resolutions addressing other social evils, like lynching and accidental death, use a very similar language, the title reflects both the main focus of the topic along with the more general language captured by NMF.

Note that the reduction of a resolution into a mathematical object means that this list is not exhaustive. Topics identified by NMF are separated primarily by the *distinctness* of language. This means that repeated phrases will tend to cause a particular concept or idea to be identified over others. For example, consider that in Fig. 2 there are no topics related to racism. The SBC has certainly addressed this; 17 resolutions contain the

[13] Derek O'Callaghan et al., "An Analysis of the Coherence of Descriptors in Topic Modeling," *Expert Systems with Applications* 42 (2015): 5645–57.

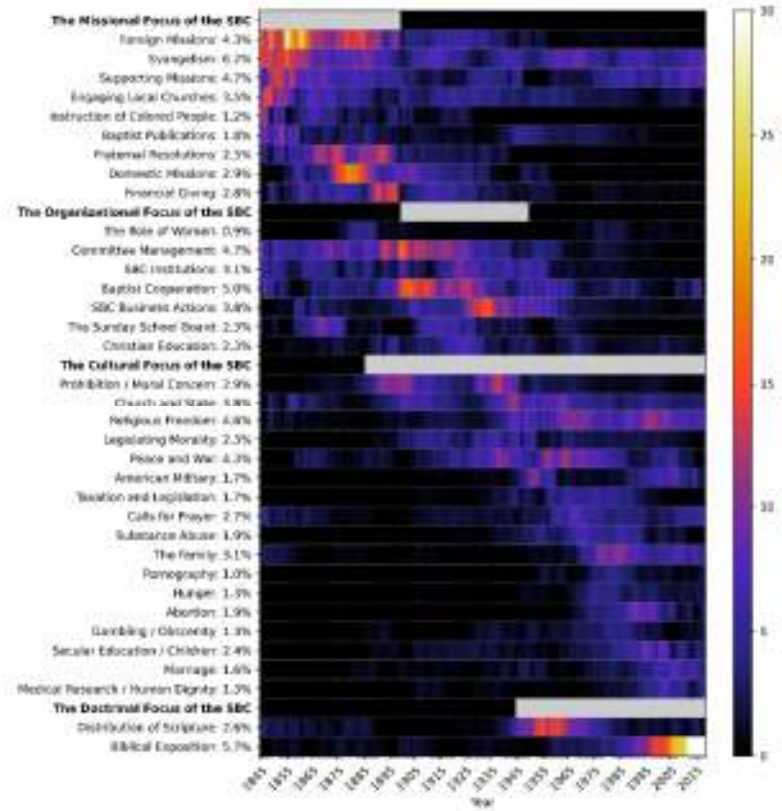

Figure 2: The percent of each topic assigned to all resolutions per year. The color assigned to each percent is shown in the bar on the right, with the maximum value being set to 30%. The percent displayed next to the title of each topic represent the topic's share of the total set of resolutions. The gray bars between sections represent the time periods of the different themes developed in this work. Values have been smoothed using a 10-year moving average.

word 'racism' (or some variant like 'racist') and in 1995, the SBC adopted "*Resolution No. 1 – On Racial Reconciliation on the 150h Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention*" in which messengers

> RESOLVED, that we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously (Psalm 19:13) or unconsciously (Leviticus 4:27); and
>
> Be it further RESOLVED, that we ask forgiveness from our African-American brothers and sisters, acknowledging that our own healing is at stake;[14]

This was a very *significant* statement but because other issues were referenced more often, such as abortion (36 resolutions) or pornography (21 resolutions), NMF did not identify unique topics regarding the SBC's response to race relations in America. While this process was unable to capture the SBC's response to many specific, but important, issues, it excelled in identifying the broad evolution of language in the resolutions over the decades.

Some of the largest topics, commanding more than 4 percent of all resolutions, include *Evangelism* and *Biblical Exposition* (5.9%); *Baptist Cooperation* (5.1%); *Supporting Missions*, *Foreign Missions*, and *Religious Freedom* (4.6%); *Peace and War* (4.4%); and *Committee Management* (4.3%). Many topics relate to the functioning of the SBC's missionary and business processes, concentrated primarily in the first half of the SBC's history. The second half is dominated by topics addressing the moral and social evils on which messengers to the SBC most often chose to focus.

From the distribution of topics as presented in Fig. 2, it appears that there are four well-defined clusters of topics; indeed, the order of topics has been chosen to reflect this structure. When organized this way, it becomes clear that during the early years of the SBC messengers focused on adopting resolutions directly related to the missions and ministry activities of the church. From 1900 to 1950, there was an increase in topics related to the functioning of the SBC as an organization, effectively vanishing after 1960. Around 1900, the SBC began to address issues in society, a trend which has continued to the present. Finally, starting in 1945, there was a renewed call to distribute Scripture, followed in 1995 by the rather striking surge of the *Biblical Exposition* topic.

These four different clusters can be broadly ascribed to different focuses of the SBC throughout its history, defined by the following uses of the resolution:

- *Missions and Ministry*: directing missionary work, gathering financial support for ministries, and calling for prayer and evangelism
- *Internal SBC*: defining SBC policy, modifying polity, coordinating committees, and addressing other church bodies
- *Society and Culture*: providing positions on issues or organizations external to the SBC such as the government, global conflicts, or societal problems
- *Biblical Language*: references to the Bible or other Christian concepts and entities

[14] *Annual of the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention* (Atlanta, GA), 80.

As all these uses are differentiated by distinct language and terms, NMF is ideally suited to provide numerical context on how the focus of the SBC's resolutions varied over its 175-year history. This was accomplished by applying NMF a second time to summarize the topics themselves, giving a way to bin each resolution into one of the four uses listed above. The results of this analysis are displayed in Fig. 3 which shows, for all resolutions adopted by the SBC between 1845 and 2020, the total percent per year devoted to each of these different use cases.

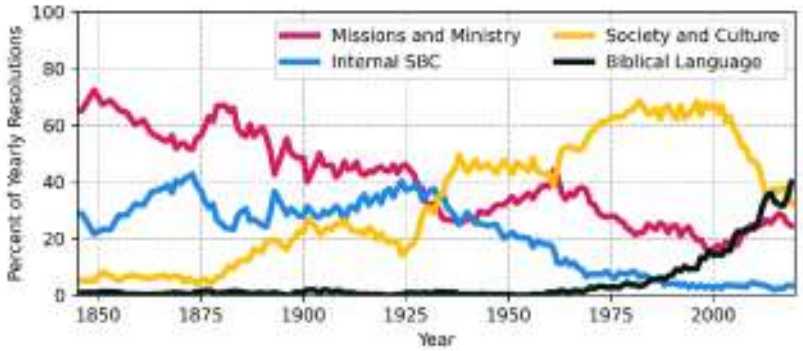

Figure 3: Figure 3 The percent of resolutions for each year captured by every focus. Note that values have been smoothed using a ten-year rolling average.

From this one can see that there is a general agreement between the most prominent topics in Fig. 2 and the focuses in Fig. 3, as the broad trends in Fig. 3 generally follow the clustering seen in Fig. 2. Interestingly, the SBC has adopted a surprisingly even number of resolutions in each focus. While *Society and Culture* holds a plurality at 34.5% of all resolutions, *Missions and Ministry*, *Internal SBC*, and *Biblical Language* are all close at 22.6 percent, 21.6 percent, and 21.4 percent respectively.

Both numerical analyses in Figs. 2 and 3 demonstrate that initially the SBC was almost exclusively focused on its missionary activity, a fact that is unsurprising given the circumstances of its founding. This changes around 1900 when, as the SBC enters a new century and continues to sustain significant numerical growth, the polity of the SBC and its own internal processes become the dominant focus of the resolution.

Around the same time, the SBC began to use the resolution to support the growing Prohibition movement. From this point, the *Society and Culture* focus begins to increase linearly until about 2005. In the 1970s, there was a significant increase in the use of Biblical Language. As resolutions highlighted a growing number of cultural and social issues, messengers began to regularly provide justification for their positions in terms of Scripture references and theological principles.

Finally, around 2005, one can see that a focus on *Biblical Language* begins to overtake the resolutions, surpassing all others. As will be shown, this is likely an artefact of the Conservative Resurgence, a movement within the SBC in which Baptists holding to a particular theological view of Scripture gained control of the organization.[15]

The following section will explore how these different focuses change throughout the years, providing context and details primarily from the SBC's yearly proceedings.

Discussion

The SBC as a Missions Organization: 1845–1900

The SBC was founded by Baptists primarily located in the American South in response to the refusal of its parent body, the General Missionary Convention (which included churches from the North and South), to appoint slave-holding missionaries. The precipitating event appears to be a declaration by a board of this ecumenical group that if "any one should offer himself as a missionary, having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as his property, we [the board] could not appoint him."[16] The messengers to the newly formed SBC were clear to point out that the issues leading to separation were not viewed through a moral or doctrinal lens:

> Let not the extent of this disunion be exaggerated. At the present time it involves only the Foreign and Domestic Missions of the denomination. Northern and Southern Baptists are still brethren. They differ in no article of the faith. They are guided by the same principles of gospel order.… We do not regard the rupture as extending to foundation principles, nor can we think that the great body of our Northern brethren will so regard it.[17]

As a result of the "usurpation of ecclesiastical power"[18] by the General Missionary Convention, many Baptists met in Georgia in 1845 and formed the Southern Baptist Convention. That the promotion of missionary activity was the primary stated goal of this body is evident in the purpose statement from the original constitution:

> It shall be the design of this Convention to promote Foreign and Domestic Missions, and other important objects connected with

[15] Albert Mohler, "The Southern Baptist Reformation—a First-Hand Account" (Albert Mohler, 14 June 2006), https://albertmohler.com/2006/06/14/the-southern-baptist-reformation-a-first-hand-account.

[16] *Annual of the 1845 Southern Baptist Convention* (Augusta, GA), 12.

[17] *Annual of the 1845 Southern Baptist Convention* (Augusta, GA), 17.

[18] *Annual of the 1845 Southern Baptist Convention* (Augusta, GA), 18.

> the Redeemer's kingdom, and to combine for this purpose, such portions of the Baptist denomination in the United States, as may desire a general organization for Christian benevolence, which shall fully respect the independence and equal rights of the Churches.[19]

Considering the first cluster identified in Fig. 2, dominated by the *Foreign Missions*, *Domestic Missions*, and *Supporting Missions* topics, and reading through many of the resolutions in this time period (1845 and 1900), messengers largely used resolutions to direct the organization's missionary activity in both foreign and domestic settings. This included encouraging ongoing work and approving the expansion of missionary activity into new contexts. Such an ever-expanding front required significant resources and the success of the SBC's missionary activity was dependent largely on continued contributions from its constituent churches. Thus, many resolutions in this period directly appealed to local churches to provide funds,[20] send personnel,[21] or to increase their engagement with the business of the convention,[22] These activities appear in Fig. 2 under the Engaging Local Churches topic.

Messengers also used the resolution for directing funds within the organization, authorizing transactions between various boards, and managing institutions such as seminaries, much of which is contained in the *Financial Giving* topic. Finally, many resolutions in the *Supporting Missions* topic capture the procedural and strategic decisions taken on behalf of the SBC's missionary activities.

Note that in the post-civil war period (1875 to 1890), one can see in Fig. 2 a large increase in the number of resolutions dedicated to *Domestic Missions*, correlating with the westward expansion of the United States. The significance of this migration was not lost on the SBC. Writing in 1878, the body adopted a resolution stating that it "cannot have, nor desire to have, any more important field than the vast region lying west of the Mississippi, into which a countless multitude of immigrants are pouring every year."[23]

Amidst this focus on missionary activity, messengers also adopted many resolutions exhorting the convention to provide for the religious *Instruction of Colored People*.[24] The motivation behind these resolutions was

[19] *Annual of the 1845 Southern Baptist Convention* (Augusta, GA), 3.

[20] *Annual of the 1853 Southern Baptist Convention* (Baltimore, MD), 10.

[21] *Annual of the 1857 Southern Baptist Convention* (Louisville, KY), 61.

[22] *Annual of the 1868 Southern Baptist Convention* (Baltimore, MD), 32.

[23] *Annual of the 1878 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN), 36–37.

[24] While I fully recognize that the term "Colored People" is offensive, it is also the language employed by the SBC in its resolutions. I have chosen to use the historical language as a reminder of how significantly the attitude of the SBC has changed.

clearly stated in 1849, when, in response to a "*Report on the instruction of colored people*," the SBC adopted the following.

> Resolved, That, we regard the instruction of our colored population as a duty imperatively incumbent upon us as Southern Christians; that we regard the preaching of the word of God as the best means of discharging this duty and we earnestly recommend our churches to devote a stated portion of their public exercises to the particular instruction of colored persons in the truths of the Bible.[25]

Within the report, such instruction was motivated by the SBC's missionary call to be engaged in "giving the Gospel to the poor."[26] This topic, with language distinct and frequent enough for NMF to identify it, provides insight into how the SBC engaged with cultural issues in its early years. Between 1845 and 1890, there are very few resolutions addressing topics outside of missions and the working of the SBC. Messengers did not use their public voice to decry evils in society, remaining aloof from political and moral problems, responding only incidentally when considering how to direct the resources of the SBC. Overwhelmingly during this period resolutions adopted by the SBC stuck to the original, missionary goals of the organization.

The Mechanization of the SBC: 1900–1950

At the dawn of the twentieth century messengers began to more frequently adopt resolutions managing the SBC's committees, commissions, boards, and institutions. This trend is evident in Fig. 2, as the most prominent topics between 1900 and 1940 include *Committee Management*, *Baptist Cooperation*, and *SBC Business Actions*. Additionally, one can see in Fig. 3 the corresponding focus, *Internal SBC*, receives the largest share of resolutions between 1890 and 1935. This is likely a result of the increasing size and complexity of the SBC, leading messengers to approve structural changes that shuffled much of the business of the SBC away from the floor of the convention and thus out of the resolutions.

Within the resolutions adopted there appears to be an awareness that the SBC was not simply a small, isolated collection of individual churches but an entity with significant political and cultural influence. This is evidenced by the fact that, when lobbying external organizations, appeals were made to the ever-increasing number of Baptists represented by the

[25] *Annual of the 1849 Southern Baptist Convention* (Charleston, SC), 39.

[26] *Annual of the 1849 Southern Baptist Convention* (Charleston, SC), 39.

SBC. For example, in 1904, messengers claimed to represent "over a million and a half white Baptists in the South and a constituency of about five million people."[27] In 1917, as a response to World War I, they resolved "that we, the representatives of 2,744,000 Southern Baptists in convention assembled, pledge to our president and government, our prayers, our loyal and sacrificial support in the war in which we are engaged."[28] In 1940, when attempting to influence congressional legislation, they claimed "some five million members with a family attachment of some fifteen million persons."[29]

Along with consistent numerical growth, from the trends identified in Figs. 2 and 3 it appears that around 1900 messengers became less directly involved with the SBC's missionary activities and instead managed the SBC itself. This is particularly evident in Fig. 2, as between 1900 and 1935, most resolutions fall into the *Committee Management* and *Baptist Cooperation* topics. Each of these represents high-level actions taken by messengers to the SBC in directing the organization's resources, attention, and cooperation with external Baptist groups. Over time, however, this increasing reliance on committees appears to have led to some fatigue, exemplified in a 1937 resolution:

> Whereas, the multiplication of organizations is tending to mechanize our denominational life; and whereas, there is much overlapping and lost energy as a result of this excessive organization;
>
> be it Resolved, that the Southern Baptist Convention now in session appoint a committee whose duty it shall be to survey the situation with a view to coordinating and correlating the numerous units of our denominational work.[30]

Ultimately the need for effective bureaucracy led to the creation of two very influential structures: the Executive Committee and the Cooperative Program. The Executive Committee was proposed in 1916, when the SBC resolved to amend its by-laws to "create one strong Executive Board which shall direct all of the work and enterprises fostered and promoted by this Convention."[31] In 1917, this was implemented, and the committee was assigned several well-defined duties, the most significant being "To act for the Convention during the interim of its meetings on matters not otherwise provided for in its plans of work;" and "to act in an advisory way on matters of policy and cooperation arising between the

[27] *Annual of the 1904 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN), 40–41.
[28] *Annual of the 1917 Southern Baptist Convention* (New Orleans, LA), 32.
[29] *Annual of the 1940 Southern Baptist Convention* (Baltimore, MD), 127.
[30] *Annual of the 1937 Southern Baptist Convention* (New Orleans, LA), 89.
[31] *Annual of the 1916 Southern Baptist Convention* (Asheville, NC), 18.

Boards of the Convention, but only on request of one or more of the Boards concerned." Both provided the group with significant powers to coordinate efforts within the SBC.[32]

In 1927, the SBC further expanded the role of the Executive Committee, designating it as the body responsible for concluding "all agreements with co-operating state agencies for the conduct of necessary arrangements as to handling of Southwide funds raised in the various states, and all other related matters." This enlargement was proposed by the Committee on Business Efficiency as a means to improve the functioning of the organization.[33]

Around the same time, the Cooperative Program was formed. It was intended to be, and to this day remains, the "primary means by which cooperating churches fund SBC missions and ministry entities."[34] While financial giving by churches and laity has always provided the SBC with income, in 1925, the Future Program Commission, in reporting on giving to the organization that year, appealed to the convention for a more organized financial strategy styled "The Co-Operative Program of Southern Baptists."[35] It primarily encouraged churches and individuals to regularly give to this program, prioritizing such contributions over one-time or designated gifts.

Both of these were celebrated nearly a century after their conception when, in 2017, messengers adopted a resolution commending "the Executive Committee for almost a century of promotion of the Cooperative Program and its faithful and continued partnership with Southern Baptist churches, SBC entities, associations, state conventions, ethnic minority fellowships, and other affinity groups," attributing significant success in missions and financial management to the group. The idea of pooling a large portion of the SBC's resources into one fund and then distributing it as needed was, in the eyes of these messengers highly successful. They also praised the Cooperative Program as "the most effective means of mobilizing our churches and extending our cooperative outreach into the twenty-first century."[36]

Given that by 1940, the Executive Committee had been successfully receiving and directing much of the SBC's funding, appointing its own special committees and coordinating activities between different SBC

[32] *Annual of the 1917 Southern Baptist Convention* (New Orleans, LA), 48.
[33] *Annual of the 1927 Southern Baptist Convention* (Louisville, KY), 67.
[34] "Cooperating with the Sbc, Faq" (Southern Baptist Convention, 2022), https://www.sbc.net/about/becoming-a-southern-baptist-church/faq/.
[35] *Annual of the 1925 Southern Baptist Convention* (Memphis, TN), 31.
[36] *Annual of the 2017 Southern Baptist Convention* (Phoenix, AZ), 87.

agencies, it is unsurprising that, as seen in Figs. 2 and 3, messengers ceased to adopt resolutions directing the work of the SBC's various components. Based on the sheer length of the proceedings, it appears that the convention's business continued at much the same pace, with the difference being that messengers were no longer involved in debating or approving the details.

This represents a very significant shift in the functional power that individual messengers, and by extension local congregations, held within the SBC. In the 1800s, messengers from local churches voted on and addressed specific questions regarding the missionary activity and funding of the SBC. Since the 1940s, messengers' primary means of controlling the direction of the SBC has been through voting for leaders. It is probable, then, that the observed changes in the resolutions between 1900 and 1940, seen in Figs. 2 and 3, represent a shift in the focus of the messengers from personally overseeing the SBC's work to managing the SBC's activities by appointing leaders to various committees, boards, and positions.

It was also during this time that another significant entity in the SBC was born; the predecessor to the current Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). In 1908, messengers created the Standing Committee on Temperance, "whose duty it shall be to promote in every way possible the cause of temperance."[37] A second group was created in 1913 to address "other such wrongs which curse society today"[38] and in 1915, these were merged, eventually being renamed the Social Service Commission. It was not until 1942, however, that this group was directly funded by the SBC, and it took until 1947 for this funding to be regularly allocated from the Cooperative Program.[39]

In 1953, the Social Service Commission became the Christian Life Commission (CLC). In its final report before the name change, the commission recognized that its predecessors had been formed with the goal of developing "within our people an awareness of the ethical content of the gospel and the social responsibilities of the Christian life." The CLC thus committed "to provide the factual sources from which all of us can better understand the issues of our day and the moral responsibilities of the Christian life in terms of our Christian faith and practice."[40] Finally, and largely in recognition of the fact that in 1991, messengers had "further enhanced the Commission's responsibilities in the religious liberty, church-state arena," in 1997, the ERLC was christened and continues to

[37] *Annual of the 1908 Southern Baptist Convention* (Hot Springs, AR), 36.

[38] *Annual of the 1913 Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO), 75–76.

[39] Alex Ward, "Explainer: A history of the ERLC" (ERLC, 8 May 2020) https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/explainer-a-history-of-the-erlc/.

[40] *Annual of the 1953 Southern Baptist Convention* (Houston, TX), 427–30.

this day.[41]

While there are isolated instances of these groups proposing resolutions to be adopted by messengers (such as in 1932[42] and 1955[43]), more often it appears from the proceedings that this collection of SBC organizations has provided council, advice, and materials to keep the churches of the SBC informed on various issues and topics. Indeed, this sentiment was expressed by messengers in 1936[44] and 1958.[45] This relationship can be seen in the resolutions, particularly for the CLC: it is mentioned in 49 resolutions, often to consider the ethical implications of a particular topic and report back to the convention,[46] to speak publicly on behalf of the SBC,[47] or to prepare resources to inform SBC churches.[48]

Ultimately, the history of the ERLC demonstrates a long-standing, institutionalized commitment by SBC messengers to engage with the secular world and promote Christian values in American society and law. As will be seen in the next section, the various phases of the ERLC's incarnations generally align with the topics identified in Fig. 2; one can see that as this body changes names and gains more responsibility the number and variation of topics increases accordingly.

While most of the resolutions studied did not appear to explicitly originate with these groups, their existence and messengers' reliance on them represent one more way in which the size and complexity of the SBC lead to an efficient, centralized mechanism to address important ethical concerns of individual churches. Additionally, it is probable that the yearly report and teaching materials produced by these organizations and presented to the convention has served to keep certain social and ethical issues at the forefront of the SBC's consciousness, likely driving the consideration and adoption of resolutions on such topics.

The SBC as a Force of Cultural Influence: 1886–2020

After 1900, messengers increasingly used the resolution as a vehicle to address social and political issues external to the organization. This is evidenced in Fig. 3 as the Society and Culture focus begins to increase linearly between 1885 and 2005. Additionally, in Fig. 2, one can see that the

[41] *Annual of the 1997 Southern Baptist Convention* (Dallas, TX), 262.

[42] *Annual of the 1932 Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Petersburg, FL), 97.

[43] *Annual of the 1955 Southern Baptist Convention* (Miami, FL), 61.

[44] *Annual of the 1936 Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO), 38.

[45] *Annual of the 1958 Southern Baptist Convention* (Houston, TX), 79.

[46] *Annual of the 1962 Southern Baptist Convention* (San Franscisco, CA), 76.

[47] *Annual of the 1973 Southern Baptist Convention* (Portland, OR), 84.

[48] *Annual of the 1981 Southern Baptist Convention* (Los Angeles, CA), 53.

topics related to missions or internal SBC matters quickly lose prominence to issues such as *Prohibition / Moral Concern*, *Religious Freedom*, or *Church and State*. This stands in stark contrast to the SBC of the 1800s which, despite the horrors of slavery and the gross racial inequities following emancipation, chose to largely remain silent, focusing predominantly on supporting the proclamation of the gospel.

The first major moral issue that captivated the SBC's attention was Prohibition, an effort to criminalize "the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors" which were "opposed to the best interests of society and government, and the progress of our holy religion."[49] In 1908, the resolution was used to marshal the SBC's substantial resources for this just war. Messengers framed the conflict in terms of good and evil, appealed to the government to act, called upon citizens to vote, vowed to work with other organizations, and committed that SBC churches would "preach temperance, practice temperance, pray for temperance, and vote for temperance." These actions appear to have been buoyed by politicians receptive to the movement, and broad popular support for the effort.[50]

In addition to alcohol, gambling[51] and lynching[52] received condemnation in multiple resolutions between 1890 and 1940. In opposing such evils, messengers consistently demonstrated a desire for the government to legislate and enforce righteous behavior. This largely remains true today, and it is currently the SBC's modus operandi regarding abortion.[53] Despite often expressing the opinion that the government *ought* to be the agent enforcing moral order in society, messengers have been significantly less enthusiastic when they perceived that the same regulatory power could be used against them.

Around 1940, one can see in Fig. 2 that the *Religious Freedom* and *Church and State* topics become quite prominent. During this period messengers began to sound the alarm on government actions they believed threatened the church-state status quo. For example, when opposing an amendment to the Social Security Act, the SBC argued

> the tax proposed by Senate Bill No. 3579 would in our sober judgment be violative of the American principle of the Separation of Church and State and would amount to usurpation of the powers of the Federal Government with reference to religious bodies of

[49] *Annual of the 1886 Southern Baptist Convention* (Montgomery, AL), 38.
[50] *Annual of the 1908 Southern Baptist Convention* (Hot Springs, AR), 36.
[51] *Annual of the 1890 Southern Baptist Convention* (Fort Worth, TX), 40.
[52] *Annual of the 1935 Southern Baptist Convention* (Memphis, TN), 70.
[53] *Annual of the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN), 104–6.

every faith-Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and all others.[54]

Taxation was a major concern between 1950 and 1990, captured by the *Taxation and Legislation* topic in Fig. 2. This also included opposition to any government funds being used at religious schools[55] and the establishment of formal diplomatic ties between the US and the Vatican.[56]

In the 1960s (against the backdrop of the civil rights movement, the sexual revolution, and the Vietnam War), the focus of the resolution shifted as messengers began to directly address the moral nature of contemporary issues. This can be seen in Fig. 2 by the diversification of topics including *The Family*, *Hunger*, and *Pornography* and was accompanied by an expansion of the CLC's responsibilities in 1961.[57] This trend has continued into the present and many such resolutions follow a consistent format: an issue is recognized, the ideal vision is presented, and an appropriate solution or position statement is adopted.

Within these resolutions one increasingly finds messengers concerned about the direction of America. In 1986, due to "the suppression of religious expression and Christian views in the United States," messengers called for "Southern Baptists to become active participants in the political life of this country—at the local, state and federal levels—in order to defend and promote the traditional Judeo-Christian values." This action was "necessary if America is to survive as a nation founded upon those values."[58] In 2004, messengers adopted a similar statement in response to a "cultural drift in our nation toward secularism."[59] Both resolutions ultimately identified that America's survival hung in the balance and implied that society had largely rejected significant portions of the messengers' culture and values.

Correspondingly, in Fig. 2, one can see an increase in the *Religious Freedom* topic after the 1980s due to the adoption of resolutions highlighting ways in which messengers believed the state, typically at the Federal level, was impeding the free exercise of religion. Violations of this principle were broadly identified as challenges to the functioning of the SBC or other religious groups. This included issues such as non-discrimination

[54] *Annual of the 1940 Southern Baptist Convention* (Baltimore, MD), 127.
[55] *Annual of the 1972 Southern Baptist Convention* (Philadelphia, PA), 75–76.
[56] *Annual of the 1942 Southern Baptist Convention* (San Antonio, TX), 86–87.
[57] *Annual of the 1961 Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO), 60–63.
[58] *Annual of the 1986 Southern Baptist Convention* (Atlanta, GA), 75.
[59] *Annual of the 2004 Southern Baptist Convention* (Indianapolis, IN), 83.

employment laws being applied to religious organizations[60] and "businesses with a religious character."[61] Additionally, messengers opposed the use of tax dollars for purposes that "blaspheme God and offend religious citizens"[62] and argued that through taxation they became morally complicit in supporting evils like abortion.[63]

Behind this consistent concern for secular society appears to be a belief that the church ought to terraform the world into the kingdom of God. This was explicitly spelled out in 1908, when messengers tied the social and political impacts of Prohibition to the Great Commission, noting that

> Civic Righteousness and the Kingdom of God are bound up in each other. We are learning anew that Christ's commission to his followers is not primarily to increase the census of heaven, but to make down here a righteous society in which Christ's will shall be done, his kingdom come.[64]

A similar sentiment is also found in the SBC's first statement of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message (1925), which included a provision stating that

> every Christian is under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ regnant in his own life and in human society to oppose in the spirit of Christ every form of greed, selfishness, and vice; to provide for the orphaned, the aged, the helpless, and the sick; to seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth and brotherly love.[65]

Given that this phrase is still present in the 2000 version of the Baptist Faith and Message, and looking through the titles of the topics identified in Fig. 2, it appears that since the early 1900s messengers have largely used the resolution to promote political and cultural engagement as a means to bring external institutions into line with the messengers' understanding of Christian principles of righteousness. Indeed, the topics identified in Fig. 2 demonstrate an increasing tendency to use the resolution to engage with issues not directly related to the SBC's missionary purpose. From 1908 through the present, it would appear that messengers acted on a belief

[60] *Annual of the 1991 Southern Baptist Convention* (Atlanta, GA), 75.
[61] *Annual of the 2010 Southern Baptist Convention* (Orlando, FL), 111.
[62] *Annual of the 1998 Southern Baptist Convention* (Salt Lake City, UT), 92.
[63] *Annual of the 2013 Southern Baptist Convention* (Houston, TX), 93.
[64] *Annual of the 1908 Southern Baptist Convention* (Hot Springs, AR), 36.
[65] "Comparison Chart" (Southern Baptist Convention, 2021), https://bfm.sbc.net/comparison-chart/.

that it is the duty of the Church to advance the Kingdom of God by promoting a 'Christian' society, as they have increasingly used the resolution to promote their vision for America's social, cultural, and political institutions against an increasing spiritual and ideological threat.

The Rise of Biblical Supremacy: 1990–2020

The final cluster seen in Fig. 2 is distinguished primarily by the Biblical Exposition topic. This language begins to gain prominence in the late 1990s, and in the following decades commands well over 30 percent of all resolutions per year. Furthermore, it is largely responsible for the fact that *Biblical Language* becomes the predominant focus of the SBC's resolutions after 2005. What is particularly interesting about this topic is that, rather than capturing the SBC's response to a particular issue, it identifies a recent, novel tendency to explicitly reference the Bible in resolutions as a means of justifying particular moral positions and recommendations.

When viewed from a numerical perspective, this shift is rather stark; in the resolutions, there are few explicit references to the biblical text until about 1985. After this, the number of references per resolution increases incredibly rapidly. This is displayed in Fig. 4, which counts the average number of references to the Bible per resolution, breaking it up by references to Old Testament passages, New Testament passages, and the Bible generally.

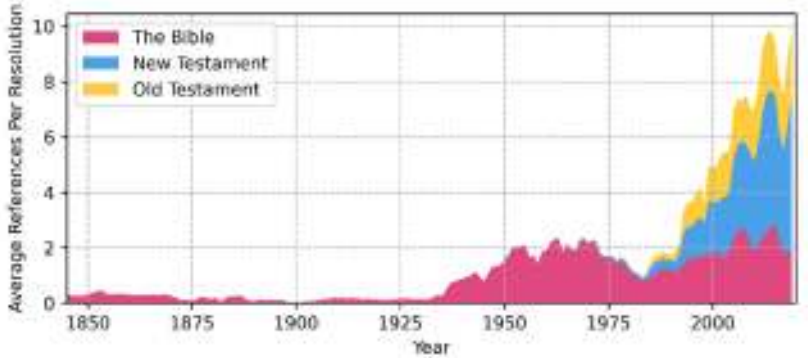

Figure 4: The average number of references per resolution to the Bible, a specific New Testament passage, or a specific Old Testament passage. The Bible includes phrases such as Bible, Scripture, word of God, and God's word. Old and New Testament references are defined by the name (or abbreviation) of one of the books in the Bible immediately followed by a digit (i.e., Matthew 3 or Matt 3). Values have been smoothed using a ten-year rolling mean and have been stacked on top of each other to display the total of all observed mentions of Scripture.

From Fig. 4, one can see that for most of the SBC's history messengers rarely mentioned the Bible in their resolutions. This is itself somewhat surprising, as the organization has always officially held a high view of

Scripture. All SBC statements of faith (including the New Hampshire Confession of Faith,[66] on which the SBC's own statement is modeled) begin with the belief that the Bible "is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and religious opinions should be tried."[67] Given this language, and the broad range of topics covered over the course of the SBC's existence, one would expect to see the Bible mentioned many times.

It isn't until the 1940s, however, that references to Scripture were regularly included in resolutions. This increase was primarily due to the SBC's support of the American Bible Society, which appears in Fig. 2 under the Distribution of Scripture topic. Starting in 1949, the SBC began to adopt a near-yearly resolution calling on "all our churches and our people to make worthy contributions to the work of the American Bible Society,"[68] an organization committed to translating, publishing, and distributing scriptures. Based on reports in the proceedings, the seeds of this fiscal partnership begin somewhere around 1935.[69] With supply chain disruptions caused by World War II limiting the ability of other nation's Bible societies to function,[70] the SBC adopted a resolution encouraging the body to support this society every year between 1949 and 1982.

It is likely that the SBC was uncharacteristically consistent in supporting the American Bible Society because the text of Scripture had become intimately connected with the SBC's understanding of its missionary purpose. In 1956, one of the resolutions adopted recognized that "widespread distribution of the printed word of God is a basic need in mission work around the world" and that "missionary advance calls for even greater distribution of Bibles, New Testaments, gospels, and other individual books of the Bible."[71]

In one sense, this support was pragmatic, as the SBC's missionaries directly benefited from having easy access to the Bible in various translations.[72] It was also in line with the SBC's focus after 1900 of molding America into the likeness of the kingdom of God, a desire explicit in the following excerpt from a 1945 report by the SBC's executive committee.

> … thoughtful reading of the Word of God will not only bring faith, hope and courage to millions of people now tortured by doubt, uncertainty and fear, but such reading will also effectively serve to repair the moral character and spiritual ideals which form the necessary foundation for enduring democracy... the time is ripe to magnify the place of the Bible in American life.[73]

[66] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 742.
[67] "Comparison Chart."
[68] *Annual of the 1949 Southern Baptist Convention* (Oklahoma City, OK), 53.
[69] *Annual of the 1935 Southern Baptist Convention* (Memphis, TN), 86.
[70] *Annual of the 1942 Southern Baptist Convention* (San Antonio, TX), 47.
[71] *Annual of the 1956 Southern Baptist Convention* (Kansas City, MO), 55.
[72] *Annual of the 1942 Southern Baptist Convention* (San Antonio, TX), 47.

While this study cannot assess whether the SBC was successful in promoting the Bible in American society, it is certainly true that the Bible became the focal point during one of the most significant events in the SBC's history: the Conservative Resurgence. This was a popular, political movement which, according to one of its architects, Paige Patterson, sought to keep "the denomination close to a reliable Bible for the sake of evangelistic and missionary outreach."[74] Ultimately its proponents gained control over the SBC's leadership by electing a conservative president who then appointed "conservatives, who in turn appointed other conservatives, who nominated the trustees, who elected the agency heads and institutional presidents."[75] This process began with the election of Adrian Rogers as president in 1979, and within about a decade, conservatives had been successfully appointed as leaders in most levels of the organization.

This campaign was naturally met with resistance, and, in response to the ensuing conflict, a Peace Committee was commissioned by the SBC in 1985 to identify the root issue and provide recommendations.[76] Its report, published in 1987, identified the primary cause of disunity as related to "the phrase in Article I of the Baptist Faith and Message Statement of 1963, that the Bible 'has truth without any mixture of error for its matter.'"[77] In the words of the committee,

> … there are at least two separate and distinct interpretations of Article I of the Baptist Faith and Message Statement of 1963, reflective of the diversity present in the Convention. One view holds that when the article says the Bible has "truth without any mixture of error for its matter," it means all areas-historical, scientific, theological and philosophical. The other holds the "truth" relates only to matters of faith and practice.

In the face of these ideological divisions the recommendation of the committee was to emphasize historical unity for the cause of missions.[78] In the same year, however, President Adrian Rogers took the position of

[73] *Annual of the 1945 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN), 32.
[74] Paige Patterson, *Anatomy of a Reformation* (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 2004).
[75] Mohler, "The Southern Baptist Reformation—a First-Hand Account."
[76] *Annual of the 1985 Southern Baptist Convention* (Dallas, TX), 64.
[77] *Annual of the 1987 Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO), 233.
[78] *Annual of the 1987 Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO), 239–40.

the Resurgence, identifying the basis of the convention's unity as "spiritual and doctrinal," placing consistent belief above functional cooperation in missions.[79]

In the following decades, it appears that the majority of the SBC embraced Adrian Rogers's basis for unity. Writing in 2004, messengers to the SBC adopted a triumphant resolution commemorating the "twenty-fifth anniversary of the conservative resurgence within the Southern Baptist Convention," to which they attributed a renewed commitment to the SBC's "original foundations, rooted in and committed to Jesus Christ and to the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God." In the messengers' estimation, the adoption of the Conservative Resurgence's interpretation of Article I was what "reenergized the mission of the Southern Baptist Convention to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth."[80]

More recently the need for doctrinal unity was codified in the SBC's constitution. In 2015, the SBC added a requirement that messengers to the convention, who are able to vote on leadership, be members of a church that holds "a faith and practice which closely identifies with the Convention's adopted statement of faith. (By way of example, churches which act to affirm, approve, or endorse homosexual behavior would be deemed not to be in cooperation with the Convention.)"[81] The explicit inclusion of doctrinal requirements in the SBC's constitution represents a significant shift from the 1845 document. Initially the only requirement to be a delegate at the convention was that one be appointed from a body which contributed funds to the SBC. The constitution explicitly included a clause stating that the SBC was committed to respecting "the independence and equal rights of the Churches,"[82] a phrase noticeably absent in the current version.

Consequently, it would appear that the relatively sudden appearance in resolutions of explicit biblical references and the messengers' frequent appeals to the divine authority of Scripture for moral support may be best understood as a part of a more general shift in the definition of unity within the SBC from functional cooperation in missions to shared belief. This was to a large extent the purpose of the Conservative Resurgence, which explicitly sought to install leaders adhering to specific beliefs in order to steer the SBC towards particular doctrines. The implications of this are still being played out today. In 2023, the SBC Executive Committee

[79] Roy Jennings, "SBC Messengers Elect Rogers, Ok Peace Report," *Baptist Press* (1987): 3, http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/6401,22-Jun-1987.

[80] *Annual of the 2004 Southern Baptist Convention* (Indianapolis, IN), 85–86.

[81] *Annual of the 2015 Southern Baptist Convention* (Columbus, OH), 6–7.

[82] *Annual of the 1845 Southern Baptist Convention* (Augusta, GA), 3.

approved a recommendation, initiated by messengers at the 2021 Convention,[83] to break fellowship with Saddleback Church because its appointment of women pastors contradicts Article VI of the Baptist Faith and Message.[84]

Summary and Conclusions

In 175 years, the Southern Baptist Convention has changed considerably. Beginning as a missions organization, it has since grown into what is effectively the second largest Christian denomination in the United States. The yearly resolutions adopted by the SBC provide a means of understanding how the group's focus and priorities have shifted, as they require a majority to be adopted and are written with the intent of public dissemination. In this analysis, all resolutions adopted by the SBC between 1845 and 2020 were collected, cleaned, and processed using data science techniques. Non-negative Matrix Factorization was then applied to identify topics in the documents, revealing several significant changes in how the language of the resolution has changed through the decades. Combined with select statements from the yearly proceedings, context for the shifts observed has been provided.

The resulting narrative is a compelling one: the SBC was originally founded as a missionary organization in order to make space for slaveholders to represent the Church abroad. In keeping with its missional goals, between 1845 and 1900 the SBC largely used the resolution to direct and support its missionary activities alongside managing administrative tasks. During this early period messengers mostly remained silent on other issues.

As the organization grew and expanded three significant shifts occurred. First, between 1890 and 1940, there was a push to mechanize the SBC. This ultimately resulted in a functional move to a more representative form of governance and, through the creation of the ERLC, an institutional commitment to engage with broader moral and ethical issues. Second, around 1900, the SBC began to increasingly use its public platform to directly address social, cultural, and political issues, starting with a complete and total support for the prohibition of alcohol. Finally, following the Conservative Resurgence's success in 1990, the SBC appears to have largely embraced unity in doctrine, grounding almost every moral

[83] *Annual of the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention* (Anaheim, CA), 60.

[84] Jonathan Howe and Brandon Porter, "Saddleback Church deemed 'not in friendly cooperation' with SBC" (Baptist Press, 21 February 2023), https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/saddleback-church-deemed-not-in-friendly-cooperation-with-sbc/.

position and statement present in the resolutions under the supreme authority of Scripture.

STR 14.1 (Spring 2023): 119–32

Deleting Trauma: A Christian Response to Memory-Editing Technologies and the Crisis in Human Identity Formation

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Abstract: *Given the rise of "memory-modifying technologies" (MMTs) that promise to dampen, erase, and even replace unwanted memories, I explore in this paper a Christian response to MMTs given the crisis they bring to human identity formation. I first trace a history of memory models to answer the question, "What is memory?" informed by philosophy (Aristotle's "Wax Seal" and Augustine's "Vast Storehouse"), psychology (the "Information-Processor" model), and neuroscience (the "Spider Web" model). I then take Miroslav Volf's* The End of Memory *as a Christian theological guideline to glean insights to develop a Christian response to MMTs, specifically those targeting memory erasure. I employ these insights to draw out implications for MMTs regarding personal and communal formation from a Christian perspective, centering the discussion on the Christian virtues of mercy, justice, godliness, and love.*

Key Words: *bioethics, corporate memory, identity, memory, memory-modification, regulative memories, technology, theology, virtue*

In the 1997 film, *Men in Black*, government agents use gadgets called "neuralizers" to erase and edit witnesses' memories.[1] Though current neuroscience has yet to come close to such science fiction, the field of memory editing has advanced rapidly over the last two decades, yielding frighteningly provocative results that have given rise to "memory-modifying technologies" (MMTs).[2] MMTs hold promise "to dampen (via pharmacologicals), disassociate (via electro-convulsive therapy), erase (via deep brain stimulation), and replace (via false memory creation) unsavory episodic memories [and] are no longer the subject of science fiction. They

[1] Barry Sonnenfeld, dir., *Men in Black* (New York: Columbia Pictures, 1997).

[2] Cf. S. Matthew Liao and Anders Sandberg, "The Normativity of Memory Modification," *Neuroethics* 1 (2008): 85–99; and Peter A. DePergola II, "The Neurostructure of Morality and the Hubris of Memory Manipulation," *The New Bioethics* 24.3 (2018): 199–227.

have already arrived."[3] Besides counseling methods that seek to employ the brain's inbuilt self-editing mechanisms,[4] current MMTs fit into four categories: (1) optogenetics, which uses lasers on the brain;[5] (2) epigenetics, which directly manipulates brain molecules and proteins;[6] (3) false memory therapy (FMT), which plants false memories to alter behavior;[7] and (4) pharmacological treatments, which dampen or enhance memory through drugs.[8] MMTs have successfully manipulated the memories of

[3] DePergola II, "The Neurostructure of Morality," 199.

[4] Cf. J. M. Lampinen and T. N. Odegard, "Memory Editing Mechanisms," *Memory* 14.6 (2006): 652; E. Phelps and S. G. Hofmann, "Memory Editing from Science Fiction to Clinical Practice," *Nature* 572 (August 2019): 43–50; Kara N. Moore, et al., "Children's Use of Memory Editing Strategies to Reject Source Misinformation," *Child Development* 89.1 (2018): 219–34; and Jennifer A. Bell, "Preventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Pathologizing Bad Memories?" *American Journal of Bioethics* 7.9 (September 2007): 29–30.

[5] For more on optogenetics, see Boston University, "How to Enhance or Suppress Memories: Stimulating Different Parts of the Brain Can Dial Up or Down a Specific Memory's Emotional Oomph," ScienceDaily (May 23, 2019), accessedApril15,2020,https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/05/19052314 3040.htm.

[6] For more on epigenetics, see J. M. Levenson and David Sweatt, "Epigenetic Mechanisms in Memory Formation," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* (January 14, 2005), accessed April 15, 2020, https://www.nature.com/ articles/nrn1604; Johannes Gräff, et al., "Epigenetic Priming of Memory Updating During Reconsolidation to Attenuate Remote Fear Memories," *Cell* 156.1–2 (January 2014): 261–76.

[7] For more on false memory therapy (FMT), see Robert A. Nash, et al., "Public Attitudes on the Ethics of Deceptively Planting False Memories to Motivate Healthy Behavior," *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 30 (2016): 885–97; James M. Lampinen, et al., "Compelling Untruths: Content Borrowing and Vivid False Memories," *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 31.5 (2005): 594–63.

[8] For more on pharmacological treatments, see Phelps and Hofmann, "Memory Editing," 43–50; S. Matthew Liao and David T. Wasserman, "Neuroethical Concerns about Moderating Traumatic Memories," *American Journal of Bioethics* 7.9 (September 2007): 38–40; Ana Galarza Vallejo, et al., "Propofol-induced Deep Sedation Reduces Emotional Episodic Memory Reconsolidation in Humans," *Science Advances* 5 (March 20, 2019): 1–9; and Evelyn M. Tenenbaum and Brian Reese, "Memory-Altering Drugs: Shifting the Paradigm of Informed Consent," *The American Journal of Bioethics* 7.9 (2007): 40–42.

mice,[9] and tests have now commenced on human subjects.[10] These tests seem to show "that memories can be edited long after a memory is initially learned … [a]lthough targeting human reconsolidation appears to modify but not erase memories."[11] Researchers express confidence that "it may soon be possible to intervene in the memory systems [of humans] in very specific ways to affect their function and contents."[12]

The use of MMTs on humans raises major ethical issues that can go beyond the usual scope of bioethics. In addition to the standard "issues of safety, efficacy, informed consent, and access, new developments in neuroscience [like MMTs] raise issues of privacy, confidentiality, enhancement, assuagement and social control."[13] In short, MMTs carry huge implications for both individual and communal identity formation.

In light of these concerns, I explore in this paper the implications of MMTs for identity formation from a Christian ethical perspective. I first look to history to answer the question, "What is memory?" informed by philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience. I then use Miroslav Volf's *The End of Memory* as a theological guideline that surveys two biblical events closely tied to memory—Israel's Exodus and Christ's Passion—to glean insights for developing a Christian ethical perspective on memory and MMTs, specifically MMTs targeting memory erasure. Finally, I employ these insights to draw out implications for MMTs regarding individual and communal formation, centering the discussion on the Christian virtues of mercy, justice, godliness, and love.

What Is Memory? A Brief History

In the history of memory study, four major models have prevailed: (1) the wax seal (Aristotle); (2) the vast storehouse (Augustine); (3) the information processor (modern psychologists); and (4) the spider web (modern neuroscientists).

[9] Cf. Fikri Birey, "Memories Can Be Edited," *Scientific American* (May 13, 2014), accessed April 15, 2020, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/memories-can-be-edited; Boston University, "How to Enhance or Suppress Memories"; Sarah Gibbens, "Memories Can Be Altered in Mice. Are Humans Next?" National Geographic Online (July 16, 2018), accessed April 15, 2020, https://www.nationalgeographic.com.au/science/ memories-can-be-altered-in-mice-are-humans-next.aspx.

[10] Cf. Elizabeth A. Phelps and Stefan G. Hofmann, "Memory Editing from Science Fiction to Clinical Practice," *Nature* 572 (August 2019): 46.

[11] Phelps and Hofmann, "Memory Editing," 47.

[12] Liao and Sandberg, "The Normativity of Memory Modification," 85.

[13] Henry, et al., "Propranolol and the Prevention of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," 12.

Aristotle's Wax Seal

Aristotle (384–323 BCE) offers the first known analysis of memory in his *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*.[14] He conceives of memory as a kind of "imprint" left upon the "wax" of a soul by the "signet" of a sense experience.[15] This "down-to-earth" conception of memory runs counter to his teacher, Plato, whose idea of memory is as "a mnemonic recollection of another reality…. [Aristotle instead] maintains that only objects of past perception can be objects of memory and that only such objects can be recalled."[16] In other words, only objects from direct sense experience can leave imprints, or mental images, that then serve as memory. Aristotle's model thus stresses physicality and movement, which influence his distinction between memory and recollection. Whereas memory involves objects moving to impress upon the soul, recollection involves a mental movement within the soul toward a "reinstatement in consciousness of something which was there before but had disappeared."[17] In other words, a person recollects by having a thought that then "jumpstarts" a mental movement to "reach for" the memory.[18] This "reaching" consists of an actual inward, physical movement.[19]

Augustine's Vast Storehouse

After Aristotle, "[n]o other ancient author provides a comparable systematic reflection on memory and time"[20] until Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE). Augustine only briefly mentions memory in *On the Trinity*,[21] but Book X of his *Confessions* remains one of the most profound reflections on memory ever written. In *Confessions*, Augustine likens memory to "a field or a spacious palace, a storehouse for countless images of all kinds which are conveyed to it by the senses."[22] This spacious "storehouse for countless images of all kinds" also contains non-images as well, such as

[14] Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*, in *Aristotle on Memory*, trans. Richard Sorabji (London: Gerald Duckworth & Company, 1972), 449b4–453b7.

[15] Aristotle, *De Memoria*, 450a25 (emphasis added).

[16] Samuel Byrskog, "Philosophical Aspects on Memory: Aristotle, Augustine and Bultmann," in *Social Memory and Social Identity in the Study of Early Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. S. Byrskog, R. Hakola, and J. M. Jokiranta (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 28.

[17] Aristotle, *De Memoria*, 451a18; cf. Byrskog, "Philosophical Aspects," 27.

[18] Aristotle, *De Memoria*, 451b29; cf. 452a30.

[19] Cf. Aristotle, *De Memoria*, 453a14, 31.

[20] Byrskog, "Philosophical Aspects," 26.

[21] Cf. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, ed. P. Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), X.11–12.

[22] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1971), X.8.5.

skills, thoughts, and feelings.[23] Quite ahead of his time, Augustine anticipates that memories are preserved not in narrative wholes but in separate categories within the mind: "In the memory everything is preserved separately, according to its category."[24]

Augustine also ties memory to questions of identity: "What, then, am I, my God? What is my nature? … The wide plains of my memory and its innumerable caverns and hollows are full beyond compute of countless things of all kinds."[25] He thus sees memory as "central to the self and the sense of personal identity."[26] In Augustine's words, "In it I meet myself as well."[27]

Psychology's Information Processor

The advent of computers in the late twentieth century prompted a replacement of Augustine's Vast Storehouse model with a new "information processor" model. Likening a computer processor to the human brain, this model divides memory into three distinct processes: encoding, which translates information into a storable form; storage, which is a physiological change in the brain that consolidates and stores the encoded information; and retrieval, which recalls the stored information for present use.[28]

This processor model also comes with advantages and liabilities. It helps bring attention to the brain as a complex processor that "takes in,

[23] Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, X.9.5, 14.5.

[24] Augustine, *Confessions*, X.8.17, 17.26.

[25] Augustine, *Confessions*, X.17.26; cf. Paula Fredriksen, "Augustine on God and Memory," Boston University Website, accessed March 21, 2020, http://www.bu.edu/religion/files/pdf/Augustine-on-God-and-Memory.pdf.

[26] Byrskog, "Philosophical Aspects," 33.

[27] Augustine, *Confessions*, X.8.25.

[28] Cf. S. E. Wood, E. G. Wood, and D. Boyd, *The World of Psychology*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2008), 198; and Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person*, 267. In this model, memory goes through three stages: Sensory memory (information that is perceived by the senses and lasts for only milliseconds), short-term memory (STM, or working memory), and long-term memory (LTM). LTM itself consists of two types: declarative memory (which manifests as episodic or semantic memory), and nondeclarative memory (which is difficult to verbalize and manifests as procedural memory). Episodic memory is memory of experiences themselves, or "the conscious recollection of life events" (Phelps and Hofmann, "Memory Editing," 43). Semantic memory is "memory of the facts regarding the events" (Liao and Sandberg, "The Normativity of Memory Modification," 94). Procedural memory describes "habitual knowledge such as walking, riding a bicycle, tying shoelaces" (Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person*, 268).

modifies, stores, and acts on information."[29] However, we now know "that the brain retrieves information in bits and pieces and reconstructs them into a unified memory unlike the operations of a computer … we do not store material by address as does a computer, and the computer model [also] does not allow for errors that are an inevitable part of the human memory system."[30] Thus, this model has recently lost currency.[31]

Neuroscience's Spider Web

To neuroscientists, a memory "looks more like a web in the brain than a single spot."[32] In other words, memories are not stored in a single place in the brain, but "[w]e know from brain imaging and from assessment of brain damage that we store various kinds of nondeclarative memory in different parts of the brain."[33] When a memory is created, "it includes all the visual, auditory, and tactile inputs that make an experience memorable, and brain cells are encoded from all of those regions."[34] Also like a web, memories are more effectively encoded when incoming data is attached to as many other categories of memory as possible.[35] Moreover, retrieval is made much more effective "when we use the same cues to retrieve that we used to encode and when we utilize the original context of material we are trying to locate,"[36] much like following the interconnected lines of a web until we retrace and recapture the memory.

This model thus highlights memory's intricacy, interactivity, and coordination, emphasizing how memory is not simple but complex, not singular but composite.[37] So while it is common to speak of "storing" memory, "memories are not spatially localized [but] spread across different structures, likely as distributed networks of potentiated synapses."[38] Each memory "is stored inside a unique *combination* of brain cells that contain all the environmental and emotional information associated with that

[29] Klatzky, *Memory and Awareness*, 15.

[30] Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person*, 267.

[31] Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person*, 267.

[32] Gibbens, "Memories Can Be Altered in Mice."

[33] Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person*, 268–69.

[34] Gibbens, "Memories Can Be Altered in Mice." One can hear echoes of Augustine's "different categories" here.

[35] Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person*, 269.

[36] Beck and Demarest, *The Human Person*, 269. This idea seems reminiscent of Aristotle's motion-oriented concept of recollection.

[37] Filloux, *Memory and Forgetting*, 48; cf. Phelps and Hofmann, "Memory Editing," 43.

[38] Liao and Sandberg, "The Normativity of Memory Modification," 87.

memory."[39]

Defining Memory

These models teach us much about memory. From Aristotle, we learn to see memory as physical motion, which can now be translated neuroscientifically as the movement of memory cues across a vast web of neuronal synapses to recollect desired information or events from the past. From Augustine, we learn to see memory as a diverse collection of separate categories, not just images, and as a faculty mysteriously connected to shaping personal identity. The information processing model shows us that memory displays an overwhelming complexity that far surpasses the simple input-output functionality of computers. Finally, neuroscience's spider web model highlights that memory displays the beautifully intricate interconnectedness within a multifarious array of specialized systems.

Memory, then, can be defined as a multifaceted web of interconnected mental systems that encodes, stores, and recalls reproductions of past information, experiences, feelings, and skills in a way that shapes one's identity. Such a definition immediately carries serious ethical implications. As possessors of such a complex apparatus of diverse memory structures, human beings should exercise extreme caution when tampering with their memory using MMTs.

Memory, Theology, and Identity Formation

Miroslav Volf's *The End of Memory* provides a helpful theological take on memory.[40] In chapter six, Volf centers his discussion on two definitive memories—Israel's Exodus and Christ's Passion—as "regulative memories" for the people of God,[41] memories that define and regulate the very identities of the communities that remember them: "To be a Jew is to remember the Exodus. To be a Christian is to remember the death and resurrection of Christ.… [T]ake away the memories of the Exodus and Passion, and you will have excised the pulsating heart that energizes and directs their actions and forms their hopes."[42] Volf's study of these two regulative memories thus yields valuable insights to inform a Christian ethic regarding MMTs.

[39] Boston University, "How to Enhance or Suppress Memories" (emphasis added).

[40] Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

[41] Cf. Volf, *The End of Memory*, 94.

[42] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 97 (emphasis original).

Lessons from Israel's Exodus

Israel's Exodus from Egypt stands as the definitive event of God's salvation in the Old Testament, and the biblical text makes unmistakably clear that such a foundational memory carries decisive ethical implications (cf. Exod 22:21–22; Deut 10:18–19; 24:17–18). Volf sees two such injunctions: "The first is that of *deliverance:* Act in favor of the weak and oppressed just as God acted in your favor when you were weak and oppressed. The second is the lesson of unbending retributive *justice:* Oppose oppressors and punish them just as God opposed and punished those who have oppressed you."[43] So Israelites must "free their compatriot slaves and always treat kindly all aliens in their midst,"[44] but also punish oppressors like Amalek "with the cruelest of punishments: the extermination of its people and the obliteration of all memory of them."[45] The Exodus memory thus "teaches not only merciful protection of the weak and afflicted but also severe punishment of violent afflicters"[46] so as to reflect God. In short, this memory leads us toward mercy, justice, and God-centeredness.

Lessons from Christ's Passion

Such mercy, justice, and God-centeredness reflects even more extensively in Christ's Passion (His death and resurrection). Like the Exodus, the Passion displays God's deliverance of the oppressed, but now God shows that His mercy "extends to every human being."[47] As for justice, the Passion shows God "shouldering the wrongdoing done to sufferers … God identifies it truthfully and condemns it justly."[48] Through the Passion memory, God gives Christians the strength to "honor victims even while extending grace to perpetrators."[49] More than that, God gives Christians the strength to reconcile with those who have wronged them,[50] thus enabling the "*formation of a reconciled community even out of deadly enemies.*"[51] Thus, the Passion memory not only highlights mercy, justice, and God-

[43] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 107–8.

[44] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 107.

[45] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 107; cf. Deut. 25:17–19.

[46] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 107.

[47] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 118.

[48] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 118.

[49] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 118.

[50] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 118–19.

[51] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 119.

centeredness but enables forgiveness, reconciliation, and communion between enemies.[52]

Theological Summary

Volf's theological reflection on the Exodus and the Passion reveals profound insights. The Exodus memory calls for deliverance of the oppressed, justice against the oppressor, and focus on God. The Passion memory reinforces these emphases but adds the ethical imperative and ability to seek forgiveness, reconciliation, and communion even between enemies. Christian theology, then, has much to add to memory's definition by specifying *how one's identity should be shaped based upon one's memory of God's past deliverance*. Christian theology thus insists on an *ethical* component to memory that shapes a particular kind of identity that is *merciful* to the oppressed, *just* against the oppressor, *centered* on God, *forgiving* of the wrongdoer, and *reconciliatory* toward the enemy. In other words, God wants our memories to make us people of mercy, justice, godliness, and love. So to answer the question, "Should people use MMTs?" requires answering a deeper question: "Do MMTs help or hinder us in shaping our identities and communities into those of mercy, justice, godliness, and love?"

A Christian Identity-Based Evaluation of MMTs

I now use the Christian identity-based virtues of mercy, justice, godliness, and love to evaluate MMTs. Because of space limitations, I concentrate on MMTs used for memory erasure.

Mercy

At first glance, MMTs seem to promise mercy to sufferers, especially those agonizing under PTSD. Recent studies show that "about one out of every 13 people in the US will have PTSD at some point in their lives," making the managing of such traumas "a medical priority."[53] Thus, doctors might consider it merciful to administer a pharmacological MMT like propranolol in order to help a sufferer "forget" a debilitating memory and live without such a "strong emotional response to painful recollections."[54] Another potential mercy might be for those with memories of being rejected or abandoned and who thus feel unlovable.[55] MMTs might allow them to forget that initial abandonment and offer them an opportunity to

[52] See Volf, *The End of Memory*, 121–22.
[53] Birey, "Memories Can Be Edited."
[54] Gibbens, "Memories Can Be Altered in Mice."
[55] Cf. Phelps, et al., "Memory Editing," 47.

develop new, love-receptive automatic thoughts that foster healthy self-care.

However, "just like in the movies, we may find that if we succeed in easily editing human memories, there could be unexpected consequences for how we think about memory and its role in defining who we are."[56] Such "unexpected consequences" seem more than likely to arise because of the very nature of memory as an interconnected web: Plucking one or more strings of the web might change the entire set of structures in unforeseen and dangerous ways.

Though a few PTSD sufferers may experience a sense of mercy, these MMTs very likely would make the greater majority of us "increasingly tempted to see our problems not as invitations to mindful mastery but as bodily problems to be medicated away—as if we were less than human. Life's difficulties become not an occasion for development of character and virtue but 'medicalized' problems calling for a prescription,"[57] thus contributing to individuals and societies that are less merciful and empathetic, but more selfish and relationally shallow. Since mercy often springs up "at the point when humans recognize their limitations and weaknesses,"[58] MMTs might hinder people from recognizing their weaknesses and thus lack mercy for others.

This possibility for abuse becomes increasingly disturbing when considering the unborn. It seems likely that, should such MMTs become mainstream, pregnant women considering abortion would feel encouraged to abort their babies knowing that they could take a drug afterward and forget that they did so, or at least forget the emotional trauma. One Canadian patient who has participated in a trial of a memory-modifying drug disturbingly recounts, "Before, I couldn't keep this thing away [speaking of the traumatic memory]. Now, I can't find it…. It's like you put a bomb under that memory…. When I do think of it, it doesn't upset me. It's like a sad scene from a movie, not part of my life."[59] If such drugs are capable of essentially divorcing us from a part of our lives, one wonders how that could really be a mercy after all.

Another problem for mercy concerns possible military applications for memory-erasing drugs. Such drugs may be used to make soldiers forget the atrocities they commit or create the perfect spy who will not remember information he has passed on after taking the drug. If soldiers

[56] Phelps, et al., "Memory Editing," 49.
[57] Gilbert Meilaender, *Neither Beast nor God: The Dignity of the Human Person* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), 5.
[58] Rogerson, *A Theology of the Old Testament*, 195.
[59] DePergola II, "The Neurostructure of Morality," 218.

knew they could kill and then forget that they did, would that not open the door to more gratuitous violence in war? Moreover, would informing soldiers about the use of MMTs before battle "make them less anxious to enter into it? Could this problem also put soldiers and rescue workers in even greater danger?"[60] In such troubling cases, MMTs would certainly not lead to persons or societies of greater mercy; instead the result may be "a debased humanity."[61]

Justice

MMTs also pose unique problems for justice and the legal system.[62] For instance, such technologies may jeopardize cases of sexual assault that would require the victim to retain the memory of their trauma for the sake of adequate legal testimony.[63] MMTs might one day be able specifically to erase episodic memory (memory of the experience) while leaving semantic memory (memory of the facts regarding the events) intact, which would presumably reduce the victim's emotional distress while still enabling the victim to testify accurately.[64] However, if victims testify without emotional attachment to their story, juries may disbelieve victims' claims or think that they do not care enough to bring their perpetrators to justice. MMTs may also hurt efforts at seeking forgiveness (or remove the possibility of forgiveness entirely) because the person wronged might no longer think that there is anything to forgive.[65] Furthermore, MMTs would raise the question, "Should a physician who effectively prescribes propranolol to a rape victim be prosecuted for tampering with evidence or obstructing justice?"[66] since "dampening memories of criminal acts could be considered tantamount to contaminating legal evidence, and legal scholars have debated whether people might therefore have a moral duty to remember traumatic events."[67]

Such implications could prove even more damaging on a global scale.

[60] Henry, et al., "Propranolol and the Prevention," 16.

[61] Brent Waters, *This Mortal Flesh: Incarnation and Bioethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 165.

[62] Volf lists four redemptive uses of memory associated with justice: Personal healing, acknowledgement of the truth, solidarity with victims, and protection from further violence. Cf. Volf, *The End of Memory*, 27–33.

[63] Cf. J. A. Chandler, et al. "Another Look at the Legal and Ethical Consequences of Pharmacological Memory Dampening: The Case of Sexual Assault," *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* (2013): 859–71.

[64] This prospect has received the pet name "cosmetic neurology" (Nash, et al., "Public Attitudes").

[65] Henry, et al., "Propranolol and the Prevention," 16–17.

[66] Henry, et al., "Propranolol and the Prevention," 15.

[67] Nash, et al., "Public Attitudes," 886.

For instance, the President's Council on Bioethics raises a hypothetical scenario in which Holocaust survivors take memory-erasing drugs to "delete" their memory of the Holocaust; the Council finds such a possibility "deeply troubling" since the entire human race would be demeaned by such a "mass numbing of this terrible but indispensable memory."[68] This exercise illustrates "that people's memories of terrible experiences can be instrumental in establishing safeguards that prevent other people from suffering similar experiences in the future."[69] Thus MMTs must not tamper with our "responsibility to bear witness to horrific events and perhaps to advocate for change so similar events can be avoided, or their effects ameliorated."[70]

Another issue concerns availability of MMTs to underprivileged communities: "Will they be affordable to everyone? Will they be in such short supply and/or so expensive that only the very wealthy will have access to them?"[71] Also, "[W]ho should be allowed to receive that treatment? Should it go only to those who can afford it? What about children?"[72] Questions such as these make justice regarding MMTs a very complicated issue indeed.

Godliness

As God's creatures, our lives are not our own but depend on God in fundamental ways in order to realize our true identity. We are thus called to be godly "stewards of life, ordering [our] lives in obedience to God's will and commands."[73] Would using memory-erasing technologies, then, help to shape our identity to fit such a God-centered vision of human life and destiny? Rather than rushing to answer no, consider several scenarios: What if a Christian struggling with gender dysphoria were to conclude that God does not approve of his desire to change his gender and thus seek to use MMTs to erase all the memories that may contribute to his ungodly desire? Or what if a Christian struggling with pornography addiction (or another addiction) wants to use MMTs to delete the earliest memories wherein the addiction began in order to make it easier to kick the habit? Moreover, what if MMTs become so advanced that people can remove episodic and emotional memories but keep semantic memories

[68] The President's Council on Bioethics, "Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness"; cf. Henry, et al., "Propranolol and the Prevention," 16–17; and Liao and Wasserman, "Neuroethical Concerns," 39.

[69] Nash, et al., "Public Attitudes," 886.

[70] Tenenbaum and Reese, "Memory-Altering Drugs," 40.

[71] Henry, et al., "Propranolol and the Prevention," 15.

[72] Gibbens, "Memories Can Be Altered in Mice."

[73] Waters, *This Mortal Flesh*, 146.

to remember the horrible facts of the addiction and thus avoid it in the future? Or what if a Christian inclined toward pedophilia wants to delete his memory of being abused as a child in order to help remove his craving to commit the crime in the future? Do such cases merit the use of MMTs?

These are thorny situations indeed. Perhaps the best response is to withhold a generalized answer and say that each individual case must be judged on its own merits. The difference between using MMTs or not using MMTs may rest in what therapists already term "working things through."[74] For example, "working things through" looks different for a person grieving versus a person trapped in pathological grief. This issue would require prayerful wisdom, assuming that the MMT could work with such specificity with no side effects (which is doubtful given memory's complexity). Whatever the case, we should recognize that God "looks on the heart" (1 Sam 16:7 ESV), "is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:18 ESV). In other words, we should proceed with a humble trust in God, seeking to live obediently before Him and recognizing ourselves a sinners in desperate need of His grace.

Concerning godliness on the social and political levels, MMTs for memory erasure raise very troubling questions in terms of censorship and government control. For example, what if China were to force all Christians within its borders to take an MMT to forget their conversion experience? Or what if repressive governments were to use MMTs to force those working for justice to forget the memory of their ever joining their causes? Hearkening back to George Orwell's *1984*, Volf recalls that "The Party erased, the Party rewrote, the Party controlled—the present, the past, and the future … mask[ing] their misdeeds by denying that they took place."[75] Christians should take this warning to heart, remembering that advances like MMTs might easily become oppressive sources "of economic power and … political power,"[76] sources that godly people must expose and resist by holding onto the memories of what really happened. In Volf's words, "[R]emember the misdeeds and you erect a barrier against future misdeeds."[77]

Love

Our relationship with God entails relationships of loving fellowship

[74] Henry, et al., "Propranolol and the Prevention," 16.

[75] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 233.

[76] Fabrice Jotterand, "The Politicization of Science and Technology: Implications for Nanotechnology," *Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* 34.4 (2006): 658.

[77] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 234.

with others as a divine calling given to each of us. The truth, as Volf reminds us through his exploration of the Exodus and the Passion, is that we actually do have such ground for love since God has acted so sacrificially to rescue us from our sinfulness and reconcile us with Himself and with others, even with our enemies. These memories shape Christians' "lives communally and individually"[78] into an eternal fellowship of redeemed sinners knit together by God's love through Christ and His Spirit. "For Christians," says Volf, "this is what reconciliation is all about. Reconciliation with the wrongdoer completes the healing of the person who suffered the wrong."[79]

All these truths serve to remind us that MMTs should be used, if at all, to bolster and not to break communities, which grow through shared memories. Modifying those memories would "affect what we believe to be true about the world and about ourselves … [since] memories serve as some sort of epistemic evidence for events that have transpired and for one's roles in those events."[80] Given the extremely dangerous potential of MMTs to rupture both the internal web of one's memory and the external web of collective memory, I would not recommend using MMTs except for the most extreme impediments, such as debilitating PTSD, constant suicidal ideation, inexorable pedophilia, or severe narcissism.

Conclusion

Given the complex nature of memory and the Christian virtues of mercy, justice, godliness, and love, the Christian perspective would urge people not to seek to delete their memories of trauma, nor to hide from them, but to bring them to God to have him redeem and employ those memories as identity-forming monuments to the astonishing power of his restoring grace.

[78] Anderson, "An Ethics of Memory," 233.

[79] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 84.

[80] Liao and Wasserman, "Neuroethical Concerns," 38.

STR 14.1 (Spring 2023): 133–61

Book Reviews

Gary Edward Schnittjer. *Old Testament Use of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021. lii + 1052 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0310571100. $74.99

Gary Edward Schnittjer is Professor of Old Testament at the School of Divinity at Cairn University in Langhorne, PA, where he teaches biblical Hebrew and Old Testament. He has published several journal articles on the Torah and intertextuality, as well as the book *The Torah Story*.

Old Testament Use of the Old Testament is intended as an accessible reference work. Schnittjer states, "While anyone is welcome to read this book, it is designed as a reference study for students and ministers of the word…. A commitment to student introduction does not mean brushing aside complexities but attempting to provide a starting point for further investigation" (p. xliv). With this intention in mind, scholars who use this book should be aware that most of the scriptural references are in English, not Hebrew. Hebrew makes an appearance often, but most of the interaction with the words of the text is in English. Additionally, the primary English translation used is the *New International Version*.

The aim of the work is to help guide students and ministers to analyze scriptural exegesis. For Schnittjer, scriptural exegesis is the intentional interpretation of Scripture by Scripture. This includes allusion, quotation, and paraphrase of one Scripture passage by another. But mere allusion is not considered scriptural exegesis. There must be an exegetical component offered alongside the allusion or quotation. For example, Schnittjer notes how a theme develops between Isa 6:9–10 and Deut 29:2–4[1–3]). Isaiah advances the topic of the hardening of Israel's heart at the time of his call from that at the beginning of the renewed covenant near the end of Deuteronomy. Because the theme develops—it is not a mere allusion—Isa 6:9–10 is considered scriptural exegesis. To determine when scriptural exegesis is present then, Schnittjer proposes three filters to remove what he calls "false positives" (p. xxii).

The first filter is a passage having a broad allusion to another passage, without interpretation. For example, Schnittjer admits there are allusions between the Woman of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 and 31, and Ruth. However, because these allusions are not "exegetical allusions" they are filtered out (p. 575). The reader should not think a filtered-out item receives no attention though. Everything filtered out is recorded at the end of each

chapter. This makes the book a helpful resource for identifying various allusions, verbal parallels, and themes.

Second, stock phrases and common themes are filtered out. These include single occurrences of verbs like מוג "to melt," used in Exod 15:15 and in Josh 2:9, 24. Finally, such connections within a biblical book are also filtered out if the author provides no interpretation. The easiest example to identify is the use of תולדות "generations," throughout the book of Genesis. While the word serves as a literary marker in the structure of Genesis, one occurrence does not provide an interpretation of another. As with allusions, such stock phrases, common themes, and literary connections within a book are noted but relegated to the "Filters" section of each chapter.

Readers should also be aware of a contrast between Schnittjer's approach and others. He looks forward in the biblical text. He does not look back onto the Old Testament from the perspective of Second Temple Literature (e.g., Kugel) or from the New Testament (e.g., Hays). He moves through the Old Testament book-by-book, monitoring the development of scriptural exegesis. This, he believes, ties scriptural exegesis to the concept of progressive revelation.

Schnittjer's intention is thus to guide students and pastors through the waters of scriptural allusion. Academic researchers can still use this work as a jumping off point for their own study of the Old Testament's use of the Old Testament. One may disagree with him on what constitutes exegetical allusion or whether something is an allusion or not. However, the work is singularly helpful in noting references such as allusions, common themes, and shared vocabulary.

Finally, of significance for pastors is the fact that Schnittjer notes major themes and literary motifs within a biblical book. Pastors beginning a sermon series and hoping to capture a book's major themes or subthemes, will find each chapter's "Filters" section a quick and easy guide to identify them.

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Daniel I. Block. *Covenant: The Framework of God's Plan of Redemption*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 680 pp. Hardback. 978-0801097881. $54.99.

In this work, Daniel Block explains God's covenant-redemptive initiative in several acts. Focusing on the Old Testament, he argues that God's promises to Israel still apply despite that nation's failures and the New

Testament's relative silence on the subject.

To begin his extensive treatment, Block shows how God ordered the creation into existence and then created human beings for the well-being of the world. This was to have everything he made function as a magnificent symphony, bringing endless glory to God simply by performing as he had intended in the first place. Thus, in Gen 1–2, no formal covenantal action was required to create an interdependent, symbiotic relationship. Human beings functioned as administrative vessels made in God's image by virtue of his acts and purposes in their creation.

Gen 3:1–11:26 then records the divine response to human and cosmic rebellion. Human rebellion disrupted all relationships, between God and the physical universe, God and humankind, and humankind and the rest of the physical universe. However, after the horrendous judgment on humankind and all the earth (Gen 6–8), God enacted the cosmic covenant. Here God laid the foundations for restoring his relationship with the physical world and reinforcing humanity's status as cosmic administrator. God promised never again to destroy the world as he had through the flood. His first step toward achieving that goal was placing the rainbow in the sky as a public declaration of that covenant commitment (9:8–17).

Human beings were still regarded as divinely appointed administrators of the cosmos, but the relationship between humankind and God and humankind and the rest of creation was fractured. An additional covenant was needed to lay the foundations for restoring our standing as deputized and empowered images of God. To restore a semblance of Adam's status in the world, Noah and his descendants were authorized to play the role of the original Adam in an administrative covenant. Yahweh had anticipated this by demonstrating his grace (*ḥēn*) toward Noah (6:8) and engaging him as an agent of rescue (6:9–8:19). Noah responded with righteous behavior in accord with his status as Yahweh's vassal (6:9, 22; 7:5). The Adamic covenant thus formalized this relationship.

Genesis 12:1–3 launches the next act of this drama. The divine attention zooms in on a segment of humanity specially chosen to serve as the agent and exemplar of a specially designed plan. This plan would lift the curse that still enveloped the world and replace it with divine blessing. Once the next phase of the project was completed, when the land was securely in the Israelites' hands, Yahweh elected David as his chosen royal administrator of the covenant. David's appointment signified the installation of a microcosmic *Adam* (humanity). The point was not simply to honor David as Israel's king and elevate him above the people, but to provide the people with a model of covenantal righteousness (Deut 17:17–20). It was also to keep the covenantal engine efficient, so Israel would successfully fulfill its mission as a "kingdom of priests" and agents

of blessing in the world.

By the time we reach the end of the Old (or "First") Testament, the nation has fallen under the weight of its own crimes and rebellion against its divine suzerain. God thus responded totally in accord with the warnings in the covenant documents (Lev 26; Deut 28). Although both Yahweh and Moses had anticipated this outcome (Deut 31:14–21, 29), they declared this would not be the end of the story. They knew that Yahweh's covenants are all eternal and irrevocable and so foresaw that in the distant, far-off future, Israel would be fully restored in its own land, enjoying Yahweh's full blessing. As a collective group they would finally experience the circumcision of hearts (Deut 30:1–10) that had been true of only a remnant of individual righteous persons (Jer 31; Ezek 34; 37).

Turning to the New Testament evidence, in Jesus we discover a new and second Adam. Jesus the Christ (Messiah) represents the heart and soul of the divine program of redemption and the goal (*telos*) of everything that had happened to this point. However, Jesus was not only the ultimate David, crucified as the king of the Jews, he would also be lifted high and installed as king of the cosmos (Phil 2:10). He was thus the divine solution to the problem that consumed all creation. Before the world was made, in anticipation of human rebellion, the triune Godhead had devised a plan whereby the divine vision for all creation would ultimately be fully realized. The sinless Son of God would offer himself as a sin offering, taking on the punishment we deserve.

To conclude, drawing on the New Testament's relative silence, some believe that God has permanently suspended the promises made to the patriarchs and to the nation—the Israelite covenant has become irrelevant. By this interpretation, the promises of a physical homeland and physical benefactions are transformed into otherworldly realities involving a spiritual relationship with God. This often leads to a doctrine of supersessionism, according to which God's commitment to the church universal eclipses his interest in the physical descendants of Abraham. I thus close with a question from Block:

> Given Yahweh's promises in the First Testament (the Old Testament), is this even conceivable, when he had so emphatically declared his eternal commitment to the physical seed of Abraham? Where then would that leave his unfailing love (*ḥesed*) and his fidelity (*ʾemet, ʾemûnâ*)? (pp. 512–13)

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Daniel Daley. *God's Will and Testament: Inheritance in the Gospel of Matthew and Jewish Tradition*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021. ix + 403 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1481315524. $74.99.

The monograph under review posits the thesis that Matthew's Gospel employs the concept of inheritance to describe reception of and entrance into the Kingdom of God. The Gospel's four instances of inheritance language (the verb κληρονομέω in Matt 5:5, 19:29, 25:34 and the noun κληρονομία in Matt 21:38) disclose distinct aspects of God's kingdom. As the Father's Son, Jesus receives the kingdom and shares it with his disciples as a gift and reward for their pursuit of greater righteousness. To make the case, Daniel Daley delineates the trajectories of the concept of inheritance from biblical and extra-biblical literature, forming a constellation of ideas that inform Matthew's Gospel. Analyses of these texts serve as the basic structure for the book, with the first chapter introducing and defining the aims, approach, limits, and landscape of the study, while the fifth chapter, on Matthew, provides its climactic bulk.

The second chapter focuses on inheritance and related concepts in the Hebrew Bible. The Hexateuch has a stable concept of inheritance: Israel the heir of Abraham receives the gift of land from God as father, apportioned to the twelve tribes. The concept of inheritance is thus inherently relational: God as father is the initiator of all inheritances. To keep the inheritance, Israel must keep the requirements of the covenant. And yet, not only land and property are given as inheritance since Levites receive a different portion. In the Former Prophets, where Israel undergoes moral and structural turmoil, the concept of inheritance is reframed in terms of monarchy. This structure in effect downplays the distinction between tribes now that God has placed the oversight of inheritance upon the king. Still, the relational nature of inheritance is present, and the land is inalienable. In the Latter Prophets though, the experience of exile reshapes identity, gentiles are now seen as co-heirs, and the inheritance of land becomes more of an eschatological reality. Thus, while the Abrahamic promise of descendants and land possession receives emphasis in the Hexateuch and the Former Prophets, the third aspect of the promise, in which Abraham's descendants become a light to the nations, gains prominence in the Latter Prophets.

The third and fourth chapters discuss the notions of inheritance as reimagined in some Second Temple compositions. These include 1 Enoch, Sirach, Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, the Psalms of Solomon, and Qumran documents such as 4QInstruction, 4QBeatitudes, the Damascus Document (CD), the Community Rule (1QS) and the War Scroll (1QM). In the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic texts, inheritance refers to various

realities such as land, temple, Jerusalem, wisdom, law, and even marriage. When the focus is on the restoration of the people, inheritance is often conceived as corporate, not individualistic, and the stress is on Israel's role as a light to the nations sharing in the inheritance. No matter the iteration, inheritance is still understood as a gift and blessing from God, pointing to his unique relationship with his covenant people. In Qumranic texts, the gift of an inheritance is viewed more in theological than practical terms. Instead of property and land, the emphasis is on identity, social boundaries, the acquisition of wisdom, the pursuit of righteousness, ethical conduct, and ultimate postmortem fate. Inheritance has to do with membership in the heavenly community and a share in a reconstituted earth.

The heart of the book, the final chapter, examines the four references to inheritance in Matthew's Gospel and explores how Matthew adopts the antecedent traditions on inheritance in each. Using a virtue-ethics perspective informed by eschatology, Daley argues that the inheritance Jesus mentions in Matt 5:5 is universalized since all who practice the ethical disposition of humility and reliance on God will inherit the earth—understood not as the land of Israel alone but a new creation. In this way, meekness describes Jesus's ideal followers who are invited to envisage and share in the future heavenly kingdom in the present as they obey God's will. In Matt 19:29, the phrase "inherit eternal life" refers to a future eschatological reward given to Jesus's disciples who live according to kingdom values, thus motivating their active participation with Jesus. The inheritance in the parable of the wicked tenants in Matt 21:38 refers to the stake Jesus as Son has in all God's possessions as landowner. Specifically, the inheritance refers to the whole kingdom the Son shares with those who follow him. In other words, the parable points out that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (but not all Israel) are at risk of losing their share of the inheritance by rejecting God's own Son. In this way, Israelite identity is re-defined in terms of discipleship to Jesus. Finally, the inheritance in the judgment scene in Matt 25:34 evokes God's role as father who gives a share of the kingdom to all who pursue greater righteousness; it is a gift prepared from the beginning. This underscores not only the permanence of the inheritance but also the recipient's permanent relationship with God.

This work succeeds in showing that inheritance is a vital theological notion for grasping the richness of Matthew's Gospel. It explains the Gospel's fusion of the sapiential and the apocalyptic, its portrait of God as Father, and the dynamics between Jews and gentiles. Reading it yields immense profit and a fuller picture of the inheritance in store for God's children.

Francis M. Macatangay
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Rebekah Eklund. *The Beatitudes through the Ages*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. xxi + 346 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0802876508. $35.00.

Rebekah Eklund is Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics at Loyola University in Maryland. She employs both areas of her expertise in *The Beatitudes through the Ages*. Here she provides a reception history of the Beatitudes and argues that reviewing interpretations of them over the past two thousand years will display both theological and ethical development (p. 10).

Eklund equates reception history with a history of interpretation and defines it as "an exploration of a text's 'effects' as it has traveled through history" (p. 2). A reception history may seem to merely repeat the thoughts of others, but she claims to retain the status of interpreter since she selects and juxtaposes conflicting past interpretations, without necessarily resolving them (pp. 9–10). She is comfortable with a multiplicity of meanings but at times delineates certain readings as better or worse (or as more or less illuminating, pp. 9–10).

Eklund traces each Beatitude's reception history, listing differing interpretive viewpoints through the centuries on the meaning of each one. She also displays the differences between the Matthean and Lukan Beatitudes, showing different interpreters' reconciliations of those differences (e.g., Matthew's "Blessed are the poor in spirit" versus Luke's "Blessed are the poor"). Interestingly, she adds examples of people who, in her judgment, embodied the Beatitudes over the years.

One of Eklund's inherent strengths is her freedom from the repetition that plagues many commentaries of biblical material. Her thorough reception history engages one with varied interpretations and emphases from people outside the reader's own exegetical tradition. When covering the Beatitude "Blessed are those who mourn" for instance, she notes how interpreters from the early Church Fathers to the Reformation almost uniformly applied the blessing to those who mourn over their own sin (pp. 101–7). However, the Reformers expanded the meaning to those who mourn for other reasons, like over the trials of everyday life (p. 107). She then observes how more recent interpreters, like Hannah Kinoti, teach that the blessing extends to those who mourn over structural sin (p. 112). She refuses to resolve the tension between these different viewpoints though, considering the multiplicity of meanings helpful.

Another strength of Eklund's lies in her insistence that Jesus did not give the Beatitudes to provoke endless debate on their meanings. He wanted his people to manifest them (p. 287). One can scarcely argue that Jesus had no intention of upholding the Beatitudes' ethical principles. So, it is perhaps good to lay aside some squabbles over meaning and favor

embodying their ethics instead. And practically, Eklund underlines the importance of living according to the Beatitudes by introducing each chapter with examples of historical figures who have exemplified them.

While Eklund simply presents others' interpretations for the most part, in places she suggests some are more helpful than others. Unfortunately, on at least one occasion, her sympathies do not seem justified by the Beatitudes themselves. When she discusses the Lukan Beatitude "Blessed are the poor," she rightly notes interpreters' over-spiritualization of this passage (pp. 80–85). Indeed, many have harmonized Luke's Beatitude with Matthew's by turning the materially poor of Luke into the spiritually poor of Matthew. She notes that many of the ancient fathers surmised the blessing was for the believing poor (p. 82) but neglects to list any exegetical reasons for their conclusions. It is thus surprising when she offers liberation theology's teaching, that poverty itself is evil, as a correction (pp. 84–85). She makes this point without addressing the exegetical context: Jesus speaks his blessing of the poor *over his disciples*.

One may certainly make the case that poverty is evil because of exploitative systems that cause and perpetuate it. However, inserting that argument to explain Luke's Beatitude seems to negate Jesus's blessing. The poor experience blessing because they follow the Messiah into his inbreaking kingdom, whether they were poor before following Jesus or poor because they followed Jesus. Jesus's blessing extends to them regardless of the larger ethics of poverty, so it seems that such ethics cannot serve as an interpretive correction.

In any event, *The Beatitudes through the Ages* is a helpful contribution to New Testament studies because it identifies changes in interpretation of the Beatitudes over time, holds multiple interpretations in tension, and expands the interpretive options one brings to the Beatitudes. The reader is forced to recognize the helpful (or not so helpful) insights of the Church Fathers, the Reformers, Moderns, Postmoderns, and everyone in between. More than this, Eklund helpfully merges the parenetic nature of the Beatitudes with the need to incorporate them into one's ethics.

Thomas Smyly
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Anthony Le Donne, ed. *Christology in Mark's Gospel: Four Views*. CriticalPoints Series. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021. 320 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0310538707. $32.99.

Given the plurality of recent perspectives on Mark's portrait of Jesus,

a winsome and thoughtful scholarly interaction seems necessary. This volume seeks to illustrate the diversity of interpretations emerging from what is probably the earliest Gospel, especially considering the Evangelist's penchant for ambiguity and unanswered questions. Four views are represented, those of Sandra Huebenthal, J. R. Daniel Kirk, Adam Winn, and Larry Hurtado, whose death in 2019 made this his final scholarly publication. Each scholar writes a lengthy chapter defending her or his position on a spectrum of "low" to "high" Christology in Mark. This is followed by shorter response essays by the other three and a final rejoinder by the chapter author (and in Hurtado's case, by his student Chris Keith).

In her presentation of "suspended Christology," Huebenthal claims that Mark does not intend to portray Jesus as divine or preexistent but depicts him in Isaianic categories as an anointed, human, eschatological messenger with extraordinary abilities. She is known for her work in social memory theory and uses that perspective to argue that Mark's text must be read purely on its own basis. One should not focus on hypothesized historical or theological contexts but on how different levels of the narrative are intended to affect the reading community. She understands Mark's Jesus as having a "unique closeness to God" (p. 13) and as taking part in a cosmic battle between God and Satan, but she ultimately sees his identity as ambiguous and unresolved, hence the idea of "suspended" Christology. In the response essays that follow, Winn and Hurtado criticize her for ignoring questions of context (under the influence of her hermeneutical framework) and for not engaging with texts portraying Jesus as exceptionally exalted.

Hurtado names his perspective "Mark's presentation of Jesus." He contends that while Mark presents Jesus as human, the Evangelist clearly shows him to be uniquely significant: He has a relationship with/to God that cannot be likened to any other figure. Jesus is an agent whose way of fulfilling messianic and eschatological hopes must be considered an unparalleled and novel development when considering categories of anointed figures in Judaism at the time. Hurtado concludes that while authentically human, Jesus "bears and embodies a transcendent status and significance beyond any other figure in the experience of observers in the narrative or in the biblical traditions of individuals who were vehicles of divine power" (p. 93). In the response essays, Huebenthal critiques his idea that interpreters can know anything about what Mark's audience would have believed, while Kirk and Winn argue he does not adequately balance what it means for Jesus to be unique.

Kirk borrows his "narrative Christology of a suffering king" approach from his much-discussed 2016 book, *A Man Attested by God*. He claims that Jesus cannot be understood as more than a human figure. He is best

seen as a king who must, paradoxically, suffer and die to accomplish his royal purpose. For Kirk, Jesus is imbued with power and identified *with* God (not *as* God) as an idealized human figure. He compares rather than contrasts Jesus with ancient characters and with special titles, like "Son of God." In the response essays, he is critiqued primarily for downplaying the extraordinary implications of certain Markan passages, such as the episode where Jesus claims the authority to forgive sins.

Winn's perspective, "Jesus as the YHWH of Israel," represents the "highest" Christology. Although Mark portrays Jesus as human, he also intended to portray him as God, not just in relationship with God. Winn suggests this can be inferred from the emergence of Mark's own convictions in the text, especially from Mark's portrayal of Jesus speaking and acting in theophanic ways that (in the Old Testament) are only attributable to YHWH. His argument relies on the concept of "two-powers" theology in Jewish monotheism, which allows for a commitment to God and to a divine intermediary. It also rests on the idea that Mark's Christology was influenced by the apocalyptic "Son of Man" figure of the Parables of Enoch. The response essays critique Winn for attempting to make explicit what is only implicit in Mark and contend that he brings too many assumptions to the text.

The late Larry Hurtado's contribution is the highlight of the volume. It represents some of his finest work and is probably the most convincing perspective on Mark's Christology. Unfortunately, Chris Keith was not the best choice to represent Hurtado's position. Although he seeks to reflect his mentor, he departs quite markedly from many of Hurtado's views and is probably closer to Huebenthal. Even so, the volume is excellent, and represents some of the best in current Markan scholarship. It would certainly serve pastors, students, and scholars well as they delve into Mark's Gospel.

William Bowes
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Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*. Biblical Theology of the New Testament 5, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021. xxxii + 749 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0310270904. $37.90

Douglas J. Moo is the Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and serves as the chair of the Committee on Bible Translation (NIV). His most recent monographs include *Galatians* (Baker Academic, 2013) and *James* (IVP Academic, 2015).

In his *A Theology of Paul*, Moo argues that "Paul's letters reveal a coherent body of thought … intended to mold behavior. We find so much theology in Paul's letters because he is convinced that he can only mold his readers' behavior if he first molds their thinking—their mindset, their worldview" (p. 603). Moo embraces this task by way of a declared methodology (Part 1, "Introductory Issues"), epistemology (Part 2, "The Theology of the Letters"), and organizing rubric (Part 3, "The Theology of Paul").

Several interpretative values structure this methodology, which Moo explains "as an exegetically based biblical theology informed by some of the values of the 'theological interpretation of Scripture movement'" (p. 7). First, the issues Paul addresses in each letter dictate the logic of his theology more than the grand narrative of Scripture (pp. 11–13). This distances Moo's method from the narrative approach pioneered by Richard B. Hays and N.T. Wright. Second, he leans toward a discontinuous link between the OT and the NT (pp. 27–34). Thus, the Mosaic law does not specifically apply to Christians (p. 616). By an internal transformation, believers "'think' as Christ 'thought'" and thereby fulfill "the law of Christ" (p. 622). His idea of Paul's ethics is thus at odds with those who accept a greater continuity between the Testaments on the law (e.g., John Calvin and Thomas Schreiner). Third, Paul's view of "participation in [ἐν] Christ" serves as "the web that holds Paul's theology together" (p. 37). However, "ἐν generally encodes the idea of space or locality" not instrumentality or ontology (p. 39). As noted below, this is a crucial concept for his organizing rubric of Paul's theology.

Moo's epistemological foundation is grounded in Paul's entire corpus. Paul wrote all 13 letters, his "thinking is fundamentally Jewish," and his Damascus Road experience was both a conversion and a call to preach the gospel to the gentiles (pp. 47–49). Unfortunately, Moo barely mentions (let alone cites or engages) a possible Stoic influence on Paul's epistemology (p. 16), as suggested by Troels Engberg-Pederson (and others).

The book's subtitle, *The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, captures Moo's organizing rubric, "realm." This is a spatially oriented idea that synthesizes Paul's theology. It also reveals Moo's position in the debate on the Pauline center (p. 36), whether it be justification by faith (pace Rudolf K. Bultmann) or participation in Christ (pace E. P. Sanders). Though he attempts to hold these concepts together, he decides on the former: Christ's "substitutionary, sacrificial death," not participation in Christ, remains the "focus" and "inner circle" of Paul's theology that explains how God took care of the human sin problem (pp. 403–4). It is the "means and mechanism" that inaugurates the new realm (p. 403). Accordingly, the heart of Paul's gospel is justification by faith, which Paul explains in Rom 1:18–

4:25 (p. 202). The gospel "is finally all about" a "holy, and perfectly just" God "declaring distinctly unholy people as just before him" (p. 398). Those justified in Christ receive a new status and a new relationship with God and enter a new realm (p. 480).

God's legal act of justification is "the objective/forensic basis for our new-realm life" (p. 507) and "the necessary first step toward transformation" (p. 472). It does not contain a transformative element (pp. 483–85) but represents God's "forensic approval: the verdict of 'acquitted' in the law court" (p. 210). Put differently, it is "God's judicial decision to consider a sinful human being to be 'right' before him" (p. 480). Thus, the terms

> "old man" and "new man" are not ontological but relational or positional in orientation. They do not, at least in the first place, speak of a change in nature but of a change in relationship. Our "old man" is not our sin "nature" that is judged and dethroned on the cross, to which is added in the believer another "nature," "the new man." (p. 608)

So, to a large degree, Moo's idea of Paul's theology stands in continuity with Bultmann rather than Sanders.

Only a mature scholar knows and understands the multitude of Pauline debates. Only a humble one can discuss them fairly and explain and defend his or her position in a kindhearted manner. In *A Theology of Paul,* Moo demonstrates his ability to excel in these areas. Whether or not one affirms his approach to or summary of Pauline theology, this *magnum opus* provides a wonderful resource of most significant discussions on Paul. It also amalgamates and summarizes Moo's other publications on Paul (although it lacks any significant advancement of his thoughts) and presents the reader with his heretofore unpublished views on Pauline letters such as 1 & 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

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Jarvis J. Williams. *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021. xiii + pp. 207. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1540964625. $24.99.

This volume offers a foundation for understanding what it means to be the people of God in a world ripe with sin, racism, and division. Jarvis Williams concisely introduces the reader to key ideas on the development of race and ethnicity in the biblical text and provides insights on how cultures then and now have differed in understanding these terms.

Williams structures his survey chronologically, beginning with the Pentateuch. He focuses on Adam and Eve, then Abraham and the line of promise, ending with Moses and the people's journey through the wilderness (Chapter 1). From there, he analyzes the Prophets and Writings, noting how the people of God are set apart and what characterizes them as God's people (Chapter 2). Closing the Old Testament and transitioning to the New, he navigates the various genres of the NT, establishing how Christ is the unifier to develop the redemptive kingdom of diversity that produces the people of God (Chapters 3 to 5). Through faith in Christ, the multiethnic people of God expand beyond the Mosaic Law, allowing gentiles the gift of grafting into the kingdom of God's people. They form a new creation that will celebrate Christ's victorious return and enjoy his eternal kingdom. Williams then provides a synthesis of his arguments from both Testaments (Chapter 6), leading into an extensive but practical treatment of how the people of God should behave in their culture (Chapter 7).

He does not pull his punches as he presents a thorough overview of race, racism, and ethnicity in the United States. For those uncertain of what to do with such matters, Williams offers a solution that requires humility for many, if not all, readers. His heart's desire is to see reconciliation and to extend a plan to help the Church understand how to walk through the evils of racism's divide. All his material is well presented and thoroughly treated, but the final section of his work is profound, powerful, and necessary. Here he responds to many poorly handled problems of racism in America, including the COVID outbreak, treatment of Asians, and politics.

Redemptive Kingdom Diversity is easy to read, aimed at readers from every walk of life, from lay level to academic. Throughout the book, Williams grounds his content (and developing themes) in the redemptive narrative of Scripture. At the beginning and end of each chapter he provides brief summaries, stating what readers can expect to find and alluding to things to come, which contributes to a consistent and helpful structure from cover to cover.

This volume is very valuable but some thoughts merit consideration. Since it is a comprehensive survey of Scripture, one might expect lengthier treatment. Although Williams utilizes his space effectively, he would have strengthened his argument from a more extensive discussion of the biblical text. For instance, giving each genre of biblical literature its own chapter might enhance intertextual and historical engagement with the development of race, racism, and ethnicity. This could facilitate the contrast between the worldviews of God's people and people of the world. Additionally, while the brief summaries format is helpful, Williams tends

to copy the opening sections almost verbatim in his concluding sections. This results in a repetitive pattern that appears redundant.

More significantly, when addressing matters of race, racism, and ethnicity, he focuses almost exclusively on the American context, neglecting the global picture. Expanding his coverage might serve readers abroad better. He alludes to racial sin outside the US several times, but examples are rare, as is engagement with such cases. A work covering this pressing issue should include matters beyond the author's geographical context to address the universal Church's response to race and ethnicity.

In the end, Williams presents a necessary perspective in our current climate, showing how a Spirit-filled, ethnically diverse people should live redemptively in a fallen world. *Redemptive Kingdom Diversity* rightly guides the Church to live on mission, boldly correcting the wrongs of racism through the gospel, that all might cry out to Jesus.

Nicholas Dawson
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William M. R. Simpson, Robert C. Koons, and James Orr, eds. *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics and the Theology of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 2022. xv + 436 pp. Hardback. ISBN: 978-0367637149. $160.00.

This edited volume explores ways in which neo-Aristotelian metaphysics can impact our understanding of nature, which then bears on our perception of God, his relation to nature, and the place he has appointed humanity in nature. Its 16 chapters interact, to lesser and greater degrees, with classical and medieval Aristotelian thinkers.

John Marenbon's prologue sets the tone for the book by pointing out that modern philosophers who engage with classical and medieval thinkers cannot help but distort them. However, this is part of the process of philosophical retrieval, and "they should not be criticized for doing what is necessary to their job of being philosophers" (p. xv). Many of the authors draw on and interpret the work of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. As Marenbon points out though, none of them can simply be classified as "Aristotelian" or "Thomist." Instead, they utilize an analytic methodology to retrieve and interpret Aristotelian ideas. Their chapters put these ideas into conversation with quantum physics (William Simpson and Robert Koons), evolution and probability theory (Stephen Boulter and Alexander Pruss), the concept and function of powers (Daniel De Haan, Antonio Ramos-Diaz and Travis Dumsday), contemporary theories of the ontology of law (James Orr), the relation between the creation and God (David Oderberg, Ross Inman, Edward Feser and Simon Kopf), free will

and agency (Timothy O'Connor and Janice Chik), and the hylomorphic view of the human person (Christopher Hauser and Anne Peterson). Each chapter has its own thesis and argument. It is simply unrealistic to summarize or assess each chapter individually though. For this reason, I do two things in the rest of the review. First, I address important general strengths and weaknesses of the book. Second, I give some attention to the chapters I consider most and least useful along with reasons for this evaluation.

Overall, the editors and individual contributors have done a wonderful job of engaging in depth with both philosophical and theological concerns. Each chapter shows a high level of academic rigor and philosophical thought. However, the chapters in this book universally assume the reader is familiar with the Aristotelian tradition, the analytic method, and the specific subjects covered. It is not an introductory volume, and some of the chapters will be simply unapproachable for readers without the requisite background. This is not a flaw in the book, but it does limit the audience that will find it interesting and useful.

In the context of the church and theology, the two most theologically applicable chapters are Oderberg's "Restoring the Hierarchy of Being," and Inman's "Grounding and Participation in God." Of the two, Oderberg's is more accessible. He provides a clear, contemporary articulation of the medieval concept of the hierarchy of being. He lucidly explains this concept (pp. 95–97), why it was eventually rejected (pp. 97–101) and defends its plausible retrieval (pp. 101–19). In short, Oderberg makes a significant contribution to the project of making the hierarchy of being a plausible conceptual framework in a contemporary context. He also gives reasons why we might think about the structure of the world in this way.

Inman's chapter is more technical. His goal is to clarify the necessary propositions that must be included in any participatory ontology. He refers to these as a "minimal participatory ontology" (p. 293). He clearly explains two central concepts of his model, participation (pp. 293–300) and grounding (pp. 300–07). He also explains and defends a specifically neo-Aristotelian approach to understanding the relationship between participation and grounding in a minimal participatory ontology (pp. 307–15). However, he assumes the reader will follow his technical analytic argument, and this may be a step too far for some.

Feser's chapter also deserves special mention. He provides a clearly articulated and accessible defense of the Thomist distinction between nature and supernature. In contrast, I nominate Orr's chapter as the least useful. This is not because of any technical deficiency, but simply because he assumes a high degree of familiarity with various views in the ontology of laws. The chapter is technical and moves quickly. While Orr's argument

is both interesting and important *in its field*, it will be inaccessible to many readers not already invested in the topic. Simpson's chapter suffers from the same problem. Its subject matter is more applicable to contemporary theology, but it assumes familiarity with both Aristotelian metaphysics and quantum mechanics.

In sum, *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics and the Theology of Nature* is a collection of excellent chapters from scholars at the top of their respective fields. While it has a high entry-point, the chapters will reward readers with both depth and clarity of thought on a wide variety of important topics lying at the boundary of philosophy and theology.

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Craig A. Carter. *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition: Recovering Trinitarian Classical Theism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. xviii + 334 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1540963307. $32.99.

Craig Carter (Ph.D., University of St. Michael's College) is an ordained, evangelical, Baptist minister and professor of theology at Tyndale University. This book is the second of a trilogy (*Interpreting God with the Great Tradition*, 2018, and *Doing Philosophy with the Great Tradition*, forthcoming 2023). The book is a work of theological "resourcement" (pp. 36, 306) that attempts to recover a loss of transcendence in contemporary theology. Carter writes as an evangelical, (primarily) to evangelicals about the metaphysical presuppositions of theological method and the dangers he perceives in current trends toward relational theism ("God changes the world and the world changes God," p. 16).

Carter frames his book as a "response to the charge made by modernist biblical interpretation that the fathers read extrabiblical metaphysical assumptions derived from Greek philosophy into the text of the Bible and thus developed an erroneous doctrine of God as immutable, impassible, and so forth" (p. 45; the "Hellenization Thesis"). He argues that the Hellenization Thesis has it backward. Rather, fourth century theologians carefully and critically engaged, revised, and appropriated philosophical and metaphysical concepts of the philosophers (especially Plato) to communicate the Scriptures and address the issues of their day. Further, he claims that modern theologians (including many unwitting conservative evangelicals) are guilty of importing modern (pagan) metaphysics and participating in the liberal theology project of making the Christian faith and doctrine of God more palatable. While this move comes in stronger and weaker forms, it results in a pantheistic collapsing of transcendence and

immanence (pp. 16–18).

Programmatically, the book is divided into three parts. Part I outlines the move away from classical theism to relational theism (Chapter 1) and sets forth the definition of Carter's core concept of retrieval, Trinitarian Classical Theism, summarized in 25 theses (Chapter 2). Positively, Carter argues that "the God of the Bible is more than the god of the philosophers but not less" (p. 78, Thesis 20). He identifies five core metaphysical doctrines that the fathers corrected and revised in the light of Scripture: divine simplicity, immutability, eternality, self-existence, and God as the First Cause of the universe. Modern scholarship's rejection of these revised metaphysical doctrines has left the church susceptible to a range of problematic teachings about the nature of God.

In Part II Carter demonstrates the exegetical faithfulness of "Trinitarian Classical Theism" through a close, theological reading of Isaiah 40–48 (Chapters 3–6). Here he fleshes out his theological-interpretive method (p. 54). Importantly, he argues that biblical authors modeled a "polemical corrective" approach in which they "intended to correct the lies, misunderstandings, and gaps in the religious systems of the cultures surrounding Israel" (p. 145). In sum, Isaiah 40–48 reveals God as the transcendent creator, sovereign over history, who alone among the gods is worthy of worship.

Part III builds on the metaphysical portrait drawn from Isaiah. Carter argues that the pro-Nicene fathers who helped to codify Christian orthodoxy at Constantinople (A.D. 381) were deeply concerned with biblical exegesis and grounded their theological polemics and dogmatics in the textual patterns, doctrines, and metaphysical implications of the Scriptures. Additionally, they faithfully applied the biblical "polemical corrective" model to their own situation (Chapter 7). The result was "Christian Platonism" or Trinitarian Classical Theism. The rest of Part III illustrates this thesis, examining *creatio ex nihilo* (Chapter 8) and offering a sweeping historical narrative of modernity's rejection of Trinitarian Classical Theism (Chapter 9). Carter then concludes with a call to rethink our metaphysics in the light of Scripture with help from the fathers.

Contemplating God with the Great Tradition is a provocative work that engages the doctrine of God on hermeneutical, historical, philosophical/metaphysical, and confessional levels. It stands with other recent works (e.g., James Dolezal, *All That Is in God*, 2020, and Matthew Barrett, *Simply Trinity*, 2021) in calling for a return to classical theism and its attendant metaphysical doctrines. It offers interesting and substantive interaction on a wide range of issues, especially theological method, theological interpretation, classical theistic doctrines, and the nature of theological language. Evangelical readers will appreciate Carter's posture

of trust in the biblical text and his affirmation of the classic Protestant attributes of Scripture (e.g., necessity, inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, clarity, and unity of the testaments).

The term "Christian Platonism" has and will continue to draw fire from critics though. Carter provides a clear rationale for the term (p. 127) and carefully delimits what he means and does not mean by it (e.g., in his "Ur-Platonism" discussion, pp. 289–93). Nonetheless, given the amount of revision and expansion Carter claims the early church fathers gave these concepts, why retain it? Could the same point not be made by speaking of "platonic influences?" Some may also object that Carter has elevated the fathers and their metaphysics to an infallible status. However, he rightly rejects the notion of presuppositionless exegesis and challenges readers to use classic, Christian presuppositions as their starting point rather than those of a modernity often rooted in philosophical naturalism (see pp. 31–44).

In sum, *Contemplating God* substantively contributes to the burgeoning conversation on retrieving classical theism. For the uninitiated, the opening chapters (especially Chapter 2) will provide a helpful road map to the core issues and stakes of the debate. Those following Carter's hermeneutical project will find the book a helpful example of his interpretive method. It is an important volume deserving wide scholarly attention and careful consideration.

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David H. Kelsey. *Human Anguish and God's Power*. Current Issues in Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xiv + 448 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1108836975. $39.99.

Who has not struggled for the right words to comfort those who suffer? The author of Proverbs recognizes the value of this skill as he observes, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Prov 25:11 ESV). Yet, in the face of the horrors of this fallen world, can a "fitting word" be found? Facing the challenge to offer sincere consolation to others, the Christian's primary task is to speak well of God. Job's three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—failed here, as confirmed by the LORD's demand for priestly sacrifice and mediation from Job on their behalf, because "you have not spoken of me what is right" (Job 42:7, 8). In *Human Anguish and God's Power*, David Kelsey, Weigle Professor Emeritus of Theology at Yale Divinity School, believes that Job's good-intentioned friends are not the only ones guilty of giving theologically

problematic pastoral counsel to those in desperate need.

Kelsey's contribution to the stellar "Current Issues in Theology" series originates from his 2011 Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary and is an extension of groundwork laid in his seminal two-volume project on theological anthropology, *Eccentric Existence* (WJK, 2009). As the title suggests, the book lays bare commonplace ways Christians invoke God's "power" for the sake of pastoral counsel or theological explanation of human "anguish" (p. 1). The heart of the book's argument unfolds in three interrelated movements. Drawing on the core of canonical Christian Scripture, these reconstruct how God relates to his creation in terms of glory, kingdom, and power.

In Part 1, Kelsey contends that "glory" is a divine attribute true of the triune God intrinsically, and thus divine power cannot be referred to as the source of creaturely harm for the sake of gaining glory from human praise (pp. 25, 27, 66). Parts 2 and 3 shift attention to the second and third major themes of "kingdom" and "power." These sections comprise the bulk of his argument as he constructs fresh doctrinal understandings of God's "sovereignty," "providence," and "power."

Integral to Kelsey's thesis is his conception of a threefold strand to the divine economy, describing how God relates to all that is not God in creative, reconciling, and eschatological blessing (pp. 167–203). While Kelsey affirms a single economy, the narrative logic in each of the three strands differs in how the triune God relates to them. In short, Kelsey's proposal centers on the conviction that the "absolute" divine power exercised in the act of *creatio ex nihilo* does not automatically denote the power of God at work in his sovereign reign and providential care of creation (in creative, reconciling, and eschatological blessing). Rather, God's power, operative in sovereignty and providence, is governed by his self-relating, self-regulated commitment to the integrity of creaturely nature, agency, and well-being (p. 95). It should not be assigned causal responsibility for whatever happens to a creature, especially the horrors that harm creaturely good (pp. 102–3).

Much exists within the covers of this book to digest. Though it bears significant implications for reshaped pastoral counsel in response to human suffering, it is an academically demanding monograph, as one would expect from this respected series. It might be seen as moving "towards" a dogmatics of the providence of God; it certainly demonstrates in exemplary fashion the task of dogmatic location.

Some readers unacquainted with Kelsey's style will find his argument overly technical, tedious, and repetitive in places. Nonetheless, his proposal merits serious future engagement in the doctrinal categories of God's providence, sovereignty, and theodicy. In that respect, an initially

perceived weakness is the paucity of scholarly dialogue in these fields. He lacks substantial interaction with contemporary writers such as Mark Elliott, whose multivolume project on providence questions his threefold construal of the economy (e.g., *Providence*, Baker Academic, 2020), and with past figures like Martin Luther. Specifically, Luther's treatise *On Bound Choice* (1525), which deals with divine providence, sovereignty, and power at length and in depth is conspicuously overlooked. Instead, Kelsey cursorily assesses the Reformer's doctrine of God from the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) (pp. 327–28).

In sum, Kelsey has submitted a robust "check" to theologically uncritical and unexamined usage of God's power for pastoral counsel in response to human anguish. He still leaves us with something "Christian" to say to suffering and the horrors of the world though: He soberly reminds us that "stammering" and "silence" are fitting modes of praise that honor the triune God's glory while caring well for his human creatures (pp. 415–23).

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Daniel R. Bare. *Black Fundamentalists: Conservative Christianity and Racial Identity in the Segregation Era*. New York: New York University Press, 2021. 261 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1479803279. $30.00.

Virtually all the standard accounts of the Modernism-Fundamentalism Controversy in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries portray fundamentalism as a lily-white movement. Daniel Bare seeks to correct the record on this matter in his *Black Fundamentalists* by showing there were indeed black Christians, in addition to those who were white, who actively participated in the fundamentalist crusade. He not only demonstrates this definitively, but in the process of tracing the history of black fundamentalism makes several noteworthy observations about Christianity and race in America.

First, in demonstrating that the fundamentalist movement was not monolithically white, Bare also dispels any notion that black American Protestantism was uniformly modernist or liberal. Second, he shows that although black and white fundamentalists shared the same doctrinal commitments and opinions regarding evolution and inerrancy, they differed significantly when it came to applying their theology to the issue of racial discrimination. While white fundamentalist theology generally accommodated racial segregation, black fundamentalists deemed discrimination to be incompatible with biblical theology. In the process of demonstrating

the latter, Bare makes three noteworthy contributions.

First, in elucidating the scriptural arguments made by black fundamentalists against racial prejudice, he provides the reader with a rare glimpse into the oft-neglected work of black theologians in America. Second, in tracing the arguments of these black pastors and theologians, he shows his readers how and where the Bible subverts the ideas that undergirded the practices and policies of racial discrimination in the United States during the twentieth century. Third, and most intriguingly, he makes the case that culture influences biblical interpretation. Black and white fundamentalists utilized the same hermeneutical approach to biblical interpretation yet reached starkly different conclusions on what the Bible says about racial distinctions and discrimination. This leads him to say: "I argue that the different social and cultural circumstances facing the black and white communities often led to substantially different social actions and applications, even among those who would commonly agree on the most important fundamentalist doctrines" (p. 15).

Bare also shows that this common agreement on important fundamentalist doctrines between black and white Christians provided a basis for limited, yet notable, cooperation between the two groups. The primary example of this is the extraordinary formation of the American Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) by both the National Baptist Convention (black) and the Southern Baptist Convention (white). His chapter on the ABTS is the best existing history of that institution in print today.

The National Baptist Convention (NBC) plays a prominent role in Bare's quest to prove the existence of black fundamentalists since it was headed by a string of fundamentalist presidents during the first half of the twentieth century. Those presidents increasingly battled liberal elements within the NBC, particularly those on staff at the denomination's newspaper, but boldly proclaimed their opposition to evolution and their belief in the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures. In addition to those in the NBC, Bare shows that black, Bible-believing, conservative Christians could be found in a variety of denominations. In addition to Baptist figures, he demonstrates that leaders and pastors in Methodism, Congregationalism, the American Methodist Episcopal, and the American Methodist Episcopal Zion churches were outspoken critics of modernism and active in the fundamentalist cause. He provides additional substantiating evidence in the form of black liberal pastors and leaders frequently bemoaning the fact that so many black Christian institutions (and black Christians) in America remained under the sway of fundamentalist doctrines.

Black Fundamentalists is a welcome, much-needed, thoroughly researched, and well-written work that uncovers an important part of the

story of American Christianity that has been ignored and neglected for too long. Bare, an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Texas A&M University, is to be commended for this fine work.

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Noel A. Snyder. *Sermons That Sing: Music and the Practice of Preaching.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021. 177 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0830849338. $30.00.

Noel Snyder is program manager at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin University. He completed his Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary, writing his dissertation on the intersection of musicology and homiletical theory. *Sermons that Sing* is the product of his doctoral work.

In sum, the monograph provides a "sustained analysis of *the musicality of preaching* by bringing the art of music into deep theoretical and practical conversation with the art of preaching" (p. 3). The author begins his analysis by considering the strengths and weaknesses of four different methods of music in homiletics. He ultimately rejects these methods as extremes on two axes. One axis moves from literal to metaphorical, while the second goes from intrinsic to extramusical. "What is needed, therefore—and what this project attempts to sustain—is a kind of methodological middle ground, an approach to the musical-homiletical conversation that remains as close as possible to the center of both axes on the methodological plane" (p. 29). To find this middle ground, Snyder borrows from Jana Childers's method of arriving at a middle between literal and metaphorical in *Performing the Word: Preaching Theatre.* He is also significantly influenced by Jeremy Begbie's work in the interdisciplinary conversation between music and theology.

The main content of Snyder's work focuses on three characteristics shared between music and preaching: synchrony, repetition, and teleology. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 deal with each of these in turn and are structured similarly. First, the author discusses the musical significance of the characteristic through theory and application. Following this musical investigation, he considers the homiletical importance of the characteristic. The final and shortest section is then devoted to synthesizing and applying the concepts considered through the chapter. In each final section, he works to accomplish the primary purpose of his book: to bring music and homiletics into a conversation in such a way that benefits the preacher.

The concluding chapter shows how sermons might benefit from the

tools and concepts presented in the book. Snyder gives a helpful note on how he conceptualizes this taking place: "Perhaps the simplest way for preachers to think about putting it all together is to relate each of the three characteristics to a specific moment or movement in individual sermons" (p. 162). He then illustrates this by analyzing one of his own sermons.

The first notable strength of Snyder's work is his ability to develop a working methodology to accomplish his aim. He builds this method through an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of four different musical-homiletical approaches. Then he synthesizes Childers's middle path between literal and metaphorical interpretation and Begbie's work in establishing a conversation between music and theology. The methodological result is appropriately summarized as "homiletical theory through musicology" (p. 36).

A second strength is the author's intentionality in giving examples of the concepts he considers in each chapter. Through footnotes, he guides the reader to see the concepts of synchrony, repetition, and teleology in straightforward, practical ways. This commentary allows the reader to see Snyder's points in application and reaffirms or clarifies what one might have missed in previous chapters.

Although *Sermons that Sing* is a helpful, practical guide, I would offer one warning to potential readers. A significant portion of the book explores musical concepts which may be unfamiliar. In Chapter 4, for instance, the author considers the power of cadence within musical composition as a way of understanding the power of movement in music. To illustrate different cadences, he gives musical examples of authentic, plagal, deceptive, and half cadences through a brief explanation and notated examples (p. 127). Considering the musicological aspect of his work, I would not recommend it to every preacher but to those who have musical training or the patience to wade through unfamiliar musical concepts.

In the end, Snyder's work is a fascinating study of musical homiletics that will help preaching practitioners see homiletical method from a fresh perspective. While he identifies preachers as the primary beneficiaries of his work in musical homiletics, I believe a second group might benefit more. Perhaps those who would gain the most are the musicians of the church who preach and teach as they have the opportunity.

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Matt Rhodes. *No Shortcuts to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022. 272 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433577758. $19.99.

For the last few decades, missionaries and organizations have developed training materials that promote rapid reproduction. Matt Rhodes, a missionary currently serving in North Africa, raises questions about these strategies and offers a program for future missions endeavors in *No Shortcuts to Success: A Manifesto for Modern Missions*. He argues for a return to the professionalization of missionaries and calls for "the slow acquisition of professional skills" (p. 18). There are no shortcuts. Human effort and skill acquisition are essential, not detrimental, to the missionary task.

Rhodes divides his book into two sections. In Part 1, he introduces three issues which he deems to be a feature of current missions strategies: a denial of the use of human means, the overreliance on and possible manipulation of quantitative results, and their incongruence with Scripture. In Part 2, he offers his own missions manifesto, claiming that the way forward relies on the development of skills and giftings such as gospel proclamation, language fluency, and cultural acquisition. He urges a long-term path for missionaries and challenges them to stay in one location until they see the development of a healthy church.

Rhodes raises crucial questions. His analysis of issues stemming from quantitative strategies highlights a vital discussion not only for missions but for western Protestantism as a whole. Are components of these approaches detrimental to a mission's enduring health, and if so, how do missionaries and organizations course-correct? Likewise, his attempts to align practical strategies with scriptural truth illustrate a desire for a robust missiological method.

Though he raises good questions, Rhodes' attempts to answer them create a falsely dire picture and an unfair assessment of some quantitative strategy proponents. First, he presents the current issues as perilously grim when he appeals to William Carey's classic *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. Carey called for the use of means; Rhodes calls for a return to the use of means. However, he omits a crucial element: Carey was persuading British Baptists simply to send missionaries. Christians today do not ask, "Should Christians even send missionaries?" Instead, they ask a very different question: "Do current missiological methods enhance a mission's long-term health?" Though both Carey and Rhodes appeal to the use of means, Rhodes overinflates the importance of his questions by linking them to Carey's historic appeal.

Next, Rhodes fails to nuance the differences between movement missiologies. T4T is not the same as an Insider Movement. David Garrison and David Watson present different methodologies. Though all the authors in Rhodes's critique focus on rapid reproduction, to present them as the same or even similar is an oversimplification. He not only overgeneralizes but misrepresents when he throws quite different authors together. He also critiques past missiological arguments without acknowledging that many missionaries have already taken steps to deal with an original argument's shortcomings. He could have strengthened his position by including a section featuring a nuanced, faithful description of the similarities and differences of the various authors and texts under critique.

Finally, Rhodes's presentation reads like two different books. He critiques issues linked to movement missiology in Part 1, which raises expectations of a second part focusing on a way to correct them. Part 2, however, presents a missions manifesto that deals with a variety of missiological concerns. These include holistic missions methods that do not prioritize gospel proclamation, the de-professionalization of the missionary force, and matters of calling and gifting. He could have strengthened the flow of his argument by broadening the missiological issues he addresses in Part 1. As the book stands though, he unintentionally implies that all the problems he challenges in his missions manifesto are present in movement missiology. He thus unfairly represents movement missiology since such strategies do emphasize boldness in gospel proclamation, for instance.

In sum, Rhodes attempts to shine a light on the dark corners of movement missiology and encourages missionaries to embrace the use of means for the sake of the gospel. His examination is notable because it gives voice to the often-silent struggles of missionaries or missions supporters who wrestle with the same questions. Strategists and leaders need to hear and carefully consider these questions in light of Scripture and missions longevity. However, he overstates the current situation's severity, understates the differences between various movement missiologies, and lacks a coherent argument. These weaknesses threaten to undermine his overall goal of calling for the professionalization of missionaries. One needs to ask about missionary professionalization and what such missionaries think about rapid reproduction methods. But nuanced, well-considered answers need to be given. That is key to indicating there are indeed no shortcuts to success.

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Joshua J. Knabb. *Christian Meditation in Clinical Practice: A Four-Step Model and Workbook for Therapists and Clients*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021. 252 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1514000243. $40.00.

In *Christian Meditation in Clinical Practice*, Joshua Knabb sets out to provide "a Christian approach to meditation in clinical and counseling practice, building upon a Christian worldview as a starting point, but also translating secular research" as one learns "to respond differently to psychological suffering" (pp. 6–7). His work provides a key model for noticing individuals' suffering and shifting their gaze heavenward, followed by practical application chapters.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the framework for Knabb's approach. First, he discusses the primacy and necessity of a Christian worldview as it relates to meditative practices, but he also pays significant attention to the helpfulness of God's revealed knowledge through the sciences. He gives the reader an explanation of what he calls "transdiagnostic processes," the integration of science and Scripture, alongside several examples. Chapter 2 then provides a historical overview of meditative practices in both Buddhist and Christian traditions, as well as secular psychology, to articulate the vast resources at the clinician's disposal. Importantly, Knabb argues that the Christian tradition is sufficient for providing helpful meditative practices.

Chapter 3 serves as a pivot point for the text as Knabb expounds on his crucial Notice-Shift-Accept-Act model. Reviewing each step of this model in depth, he uses extensive references and examples from Scripture. He also articulates the necessity of shifting one's thoughts from an earthly present to a heavenly future. This shift, he claims, is essential for one to know God rightly and sense his presence.

Chapters 4–8 provide the practical application of his model, targeting five areas: cognition, affect, behavior, the self, and relationships. The bulk of each chapter, after a brief introduction and explanation, contains a list of exercises that clinicians can use to work through the four-step model. These include meditations on Scripture, historical readings, and other noteworthy phrases/texts. Each is designed to draw the participant towards the prescribed shift from self to God. While the exercises themselves change, the purpose remains consistent.

Knabb's work, including its listed exercises, has many notable strengths and benefits. First, it is easy to treat the words "meditation" and "clinical practice" (for better or worse) with skepticism. Put another way, one typically assumes the author is beginning with psychology and attempting to fit Scripture into it. However, that is not the case here. Knabb

desires to begin and end with Scripture (as he demonstrates with his pyramid on p. 6). Throughout the book, he constantly starts with the biblical text and filters any secular discussion through it. This is refreshing, given the characteristic approach of integrative literature.

Second, this work is very clearly written and easy to understand, a skill that cannot be understated. Terms are defined appropriately, the audience and purpose are stated early (and aligned with the rest of the text), and the entire book is immensely practical. The structure lends itself towards ease of understanding.

Third, the book rightly pushes the reader (quite forcefully, at times!) towards an outward and upward focus. The reality in working with mental health struggles is the enduring tendency to look inward, focusing much more on one's present circumstances than the situations of others or even beyond the present moment. And yet, three of the four steps of Knabb's model intentionally shift one's gaze away from oneself. This is a crucial component for healing and growth.

Finally, and somewhat related to the strengths just noted, Knabb properly defines "success" or "healing" as finding contentment in God. Truly, that is sanctification! Rather than asking the clinician to focus on symptom reduction, Knabb rightly sees "feeling better" as a *byproduct* of first shifting one's gaze outward and upward. Contentment in God is the goal; symptom reduction is an offshoot (albeit helpful and even anticipated). This emphasis marks a major shift from secular psychology. It is a goal firmly rooted in Scripture, further affirming Knabb's primacy of God's revealed word over our observations of his world.

I find very little to critique. Most notable is the lack of explicit conversation about one's heart, or one's desires/motivations/values. His five areas of application hint at but do not explicitly draw out one's desires. This is somewhat disappointing, given Scripture's emphasis on the heart driving human cognition and behavior (see Luke 6:45). It would also have helped to see a bit more conversation about horizontal relationships in Chapter 8 since these are oftentimes a significant source of struggle. Then, as it stands, the ending feels a bit abrupt, lacking a clear conclusion chapter.

All in all, this is a very helpful text, one I will likely include as required reading for future coursework. It has great potential to help Christian clinicians think practically about integrating Scripture and the practice of meditation, a technique supported by observational evidence for some time now.

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Todd Miles. *Cannabis and the Christian: What the Bible Says about Marijuana*. Nashville: B&H, 2021. 166 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1087734965. $12.99.

Writing from a conviction that "the Christian should be deeply concerned about what Jesus thinks about marijuana," Todd Miles aims to examine Scripture and common arguments for and against using it (p. 8). His first chapter offers a definition of marijuana, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), and cannabidiol (CBD) before explaining, neurologically and physiologically, what happens when one "gets high." The goal of Chapter 2 is to examine the risks associated with marijuana use and "to think like a disciple of Jesus Christ and apply the wisdom of Holy Scripture in a manner that glorifies Christ" (p. 31). Identified risks include addiction, intoxication, lung and heart issues caused by marijuana smoke, impeded brain development, psychosis, and mental illness. One of Miles's key concerns, the impacts of marijuana use on teens, emerges in this chapter.

Chapter 3 cautions Christians not to equate governmental civil law with the moral will of God. After expounding Romans 13, Miles offers the caveat, "what the government commands is not always righteous, and the Christian is not obligated to obey the government by disobeying God" (p. 60). Drawing on such insights, he offers nuanced understandings of various aspects of marijuana use throughout the book. This strengthens his argumentation. After discussing the relationship between human authority and God's authority, he traces the legal history of marijuana in the twentieth century. Beginning with the 1937 Marijuana Tax Act, he charts the government's relationship with recreational and medical marijuana, culminating in discussions of legal marijuana circa 2020. However, he does not elaborate on any specific laws or court cases that have moved the legalization of marijuana forward in recent years.

His fourth chapter, "The Bible and Marijuana," surveys common arguments for and against the use of marijuana. After exploring common responses, Miles admits there are "no biblical references to the cannabis plant" (p. 70). A strength here is his anti-proof text approach. Instead, he appeals to the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and argues that all plants—hemp, Cannabis sativa, Cannabis indica, and other varieties of cannabis—are part of God's good creation. He thus arrives at the conclusion that "cannabis is the good provision of a kind and benevolent God," but that "cannabis, like any of the Lord's good gifts, can be misused" (pp. 76–77).

Chapter 5 offers questions all Christians should ask before using marijuana recreationally while Chapter 6 aims "to explore the efficacy of medical marijuana" (p. 118). After discussing the perceived benefits of THC for medical treatment, Miles claims "about half of the studies show

hopeful signs, while the other half show no significant benefit at all" (p. 122). However, he argues that certain components of marijuana plants can be extracted and used to supplement other forms of medical treatment. Here he distinguishes between the use of THC, which is mind altering and causes intoxication and addiction, and CBD which does not. He appeals to medical studies that show CBD may be helpful in pain relief and decreasing seizures in certain forms of epilepsy. Furthermore, since the US Department of Agriculture has approved certain drugs for medical use, he concludes, "There is no reason to feel that CBD is off-limits. If it helps you, then use it" (p. 126).

After providing a brief theological anthropology and a "biblical theology" of suffering in Chapter 7, Miles asserts that seeking alleviation from suffering, whether supernaturally from God or by means God provides, is not wrong for Christians. The chapter closes with seven questions about medical marijuana "designed to help the pastor when approached by a congregant seeking counsel" (p. 148). The appendix contains twelve more questions and answers for parents and church leaders, ranging from, "Is it permissible for non-Christians to smoke pot?" to "Are Christians morally obligated to vote against legalization in states that have not yet legalized marijuana?" (pp. 154–66).

Miles's goal is to contribute to Christian thought about marijuana in this helpful primer. The breadth of research and questions engaged reveal his experience teaching the topic, and his consistent appeal to Scripture provides robust arguments for Christians. Relying on the authority of Scripture where the Bible speaks and his openness to scientific research where it is silent provides a balanced and helpful model for the relationship between Christianity and science.

Finally, while Miles gives significant attention to the use of medical marijuana in this work, a helpful update would include questions about ownership and investment in the medical marijuana industry. As he notes, recreational and medical marijuana use is now legal in many states. Significantly, the sale of, and investment in, dispensaries and CBD and THC companies are also legal in some states. With frequent initial public offerings and low-cost marijuana company stocks now available, Christians are faced with ethical "business" questions surrounding investment and ownership, not just questions of "use."

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